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The best of the new and the best of the old

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TOO LOVELY TO LIVE

by Ruth Fenisong

(*formerly "Miscast for Murder"*)

The Hotel Gretna was no place for a nice girl to go. But Bess's compulsion to see Kevin Culhane was greater than her fear. Even if she had surprised him with a beautiful young girl, Kevin was still her father. She didn't know then about the once-vivacious woman lying on her father's bed, her dark hair matted with blood. ". . . neatly plotted . . ." says the Boston *Globe.* **A BESTSELLER MYSTERY**

DEATH RIDES A PAINTED HORSE

by Robert Patrick Wilmot

(Abridged Edition)

Little Crummy Maurice wanted a shamus to investigate a case for him. So he had a couple of strongarm boys commandeer Steve Considine. As an added inducement, Maurice gave Steve a good natured burlesque queen to help him. It was a merry chase until Steve stepped on the carousel that almost whirled him away to death. ". . . very well-told yarn," reports the New York *Times.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY

SHOOT A SITTING DUCK

by David Alexander

A NEW ORIGINAL NOVEL

Bart Hardin, Editor of the Broadway *Times,* expected trouble when the lush and lovely showgirl he was guarding disappeared. Then the corpse of a Greenwich Village artist turned up on Bart's doorstep. And Bart was left holding $50,000 in ransom bills and a theater stub that looked like a one-way ticket to the chair. Together with this tough and terrific novel, you will find fascinating several shorter pieces, including a new slant on Davy Crockett; three vignettes by Damon Runyon; a revealing article on wiretapping and how it can affect you; and the dramatic story of a merry widow whose death was as sensational as her life.

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MORE THAN 60 MILLION BOOKS AND MAGAZINES SOLD TO ENTHUSIASTIC READERS

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You will recall that in our August 1954 issue we gave you a short novel — Roy Vickers's FIND THE INNOCENT. *To justify our publication of a short novel, we made it a two-part serial — but to keep you from biting your fingernails, we printed both parts in the same issue! This experiment proved so successful — as an occasional change of pace — that we are encouraged to offer you another short novel, and again we have chosen a new story by Roy Vickers. So here, at the beginning of this issue, is Part One of* FOR MEN ONLY, *and at the end of this issue you will find Part Two.*

FOR MEN ONLY *has a sure-fire situation: a glamorous, provocative, sense-tingling actress celebrates her birthday on a luxury motorboat in the company of five men — her current lover and four ex-lovers. The boat unexpectedly runs aground, the party is isolated until the tide turns, and — but that is all we shall tell you. If at the end of Part One of what might be called "The Show Girl Murder Case; or, The Clue of the Wedding Ring" you can refrain from flipping immediately to Part Two, beginning on page 125, to find out what really happened, then you are a more patient and a less demanding reader than we think you are!*

For this newest story by Roy Vickers is another of his fascinating studies in murder and the events leading up to the unavoidable tragedy — another "photo-crime" so realistically projected that you will think you are reading the facts in a true case. Or as James Sandoe expressed it in "Criminal Clef" in his anthology titled MURDER: PLAIN AND FANCIFUL: *Mr. Vickers's short stories "are so meticulous and circumstantial as to seem inevitably drawn from life."*

FOR MEN ONLY

by ROY VICKERS

FROM THE OFFICIAL POINT OF VIEW, the murder on the *Astarte* proved to be a unique affair: it simply couldn't have happened more than once. There was no running about of the investigators; not a single motor car was employed on either side; there were not even any telephone calls. The corpse was delivered at the doors of Scotland Yard together with — in the same parcel, as it were — all the witnesses and the very "scene of the crime" itself, complete with fingerprints, footprints, and four red-hot suspects.

This unusual situation was not contrived by anyone. It came about as the result of intelligent, law-abiding

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persons behaving as sensibly as they could in the circumstances of a murder, in itself an unsophisticated affair, accomplished with a carving knife. The oddity of the situation was due to the disturbing and unbalancing personality of Mabel Rouse.

There have always been women like Mabel, often cropping up in other people's Memoirs. They are those kind-hearted, unreliable women of no importance — not clever and not as physically gorgeous as they make you think they are — who distort the perspective of able men, including policemen. Detective Inspector Kyle, though himself undisturbed by her physical presence, was aware of her pervasive genius constantly impeding his investigation and throwing normal procedure out of gear.

The crime thrust itself upon the police on a very hot afternoon in a very hot summer. On Waterloo Bridge many pedestrians stopped to admire the motorboat, *Astarte*, as it passed under the bridge on its way upstream. When the boat was within hailing distance of Westminster Pier, its horn sounded. A waterman came out of the shed which was the public waiting room and observed the boat, admiring its general air of luxury. Upwards of 50 feet on the water line, he guessed; built for river and coastal cruising with more beam than one would expect, and a railed deck on the roof. One-man control, too. In a word — money!

The *Astarte* approached to within six feet of the pier, then held itself against the current. The skipper and owner was a man in his early thirties. He was clad in a pullover sweater and flannels; his hair was rumpled, his lean face was moist, but a certain elegance persisted. He called out to the pier hand.

"I want you to run across the road to Scotland Yard." He was not shouting: his voice had the pitch and clarity of the trained speaker. He lobbed a cigar box, which the other caught. "Give them the envelope in that box. The ten bob wrapped round the envelope is yours. Please be as quick as you can."

With a glance at the closed door of the saloon — the lounge of the boat — the skipper moved away from the pier, crossed the river and began to potter about, to kill time. It would take the waterman, say, a minute to work his way across the road. At the Yard, a few minutes might be lost before the note was read by an official with authority to act; then another three or four minutes for the machinery to start. Call it ten minutes, all told.

The envelope, marked *Very Urgent*, was addressed to the *Chief Inspector or Deputy*. Within two minutes it was opened by Detective Inspector Kyle.

The note paper was embossed *Astarte*.

A murder has been committed on this launch. I am off Westminster Pier and will put in on signal from you with white handkerchief waved at shoulder level. George Broughby (owner).

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Inspector Kyle, an ascetic bachelor, had the appearance of a prosperous businessman with a large family of daughters. He never rushed anything. He blinked at the note, then swiveled in his chair and reached for Lloyd's register. "*Astarte:* owner, George Broughby." Good! Ninety seconds later he had learned that George Broughby was 35, unmarried, chairman of Broughby Tyres, Ltd., a firm founded by Broughby Senior, and that he owned a racing stable. He rang for Sergeant Dobson and gave instructions, with special reference to keeping off sightseers.

Within eleven minutes of reading Broughby's note, Kyle was on the pier. Beside him stood Sergeant Dobson, two plainclothesmen in the rear. There were two uniformed constables on the Embankment and a dozen standing by at the Yard. The team of technical men was due to report on the pier in ten minutes.

The *Astarte* was idling on the Surrey side. Kyle waved a white handkerchief at shoulder level. The launch crossed the river at half speed. At a nod from Broughby the waterman made fast.

"I am Detective Inspector Kyle."

"My name is Broughby. Come aboard, please."

And with these words the murder investigation began . . .

The *Astarte* had sailed from Chiswick that morning, the intention being to run down the river to Southend regatta. George Broughby was giving a small birthday party — Mabel's birthday, of course. Her twenty-eighth, she said, and like most of her positive statements this was nearly true.

Mabel was "resting." In this phase of her life she was, in a sense, an actress — though perhaps "artiste" would be the safer word. As "Cherry Dane" she played small roles on the stage and bit parts on the films, but most of her engagements were in night clubs. That she could do an acceptable turn, however witless, in a floor show was due to her infectious vitality — an effervescence of contradictory qualities, strangely echoed in her physical appearance.

She had coppery-chestnut hair, bright blue eyes, a slightly tilted nose, and a mouth wide enough to awaken surmise. Her natural color clash was carefully developed in her dress. A green jumper fought with a tartan skirt which owed less to Scotland than to Hollywood; her stockings maintained neutrality; her black shoes had green buckles — and she absorbed it all into a vivid unit that was herself. Her voice was a veiled contralto which so often lent her banalities the timbre of an intimate confession.

As to her character, she was acquisitive without being mercenary. She would never bestow herself for money, though she contrived to love, with some frequency, where money abounded.

She cheated nobody but herself. Her ex-lovers remained staunch

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friends, holding her in a kind of family affection. She created her own social atmosphere, which would have been acceptable almost anywhere if she had wished to make it so.

First aboard that morning had been Mabel herself. One boarded the *Astarte* at the wheelhouse, which was a little aft: forward was the saloon, with a companionway to the deck, the floor of the deck being the roof of the saloon. She turned aft and opened a door giving on to a corridor.

On her left — she could never think in terms of port and starboard — was the galley, which she called the kitchenette, fitted with a small electric cooker and a large refrigerator, a waste bin and a basket for unwashed crockery and table utensils. On the right of the corridor were two guest cabins, containing bunks — beyond these, a bathroom-toilet.

Again on her left, next to the galley, was a single cabin nearly as large as the two guest cabins together; and beyond it, opposite the bathroom, were lockers which she called cupboards. From one of the latter she took a full-length overall, a duster, and a chamois cloth.

The double-size cabin was Mabel's, of course. She pushed back the sliding door. The cabin made few concessions to maritime prejudice, having the general appearance of a bedroom in the London flat of a fastidious woman. True, the legs of the bed were screwed to the floor, as were those of the dressing table, and the wardrobe, with a full-length mirror, was built in.

On the bevel of the mirror she was happy to find a little dust overlooked by the staff that serviced the *Astarte* by contract. It justified the duster, which was less an article of equipment than a symbol of the domesticity which she honestly believed she craved. With any luck she would find a job for the chamois. Presently, she went forward, past the wheelhouse, down the companionway to the saloon.

Here again Mabel's influence was instantly discernible in the unusual liberality of floor space. It was possible to walk about without wriggling or even dodging, and a tall man could stand erect, not only under the superstructure that gave a center light but everywhere else. There were two divans and two heavy armchairs, besides easy chairs of upholstered wicker. An escritoire was flanked by a television console and a cocktail cabinet. There was no center table, but one could be conjured up in a few minutes by means of a system of interlocking occasional tables, the legs fitting into permanent sockets in the floor.

Mabel was putting an extra sheen on the cocktail glasses when George Broughby came aboard.

For a dozen years George Broughby had frustrated match-making mothers, without deeply offending a single one of them. He positively bristled with eligibilities of position and even of person. The inner conflicts of his temperament did not meet the eye. He was too intelligent to interfere with the successful management of

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Broughby Tyres, and it was not easy to find employment for his talents elsewhere. He had grown tired of the toys still available to a rich man until he had chanced upon Mabel. He had snatched her, to discover, too late, that she was not a toy at all — though she herself believed that she could not be anything else.

When Broughby entered the saloon he stood silent, watching Mabel intently, as if he were trying to reassess her.

"I've nearly finished," she said without looking up. "George, I heard you talking on the 'phone to Harold Crendon. Who is the American he's bringing along?"

"I don't know. Hold everything for a minute and listen. I have news — important news. That fellow who came to the flat this morning as you left was the Party agent. They've chosen me as candidate for Charbury. I'm to go down on Tuesday and speak."

"How perfectly splendid, George!" She had turned herself into a shimmering figure of delight. "It's what you wanted more than anything." Therefore, for the moment, it was what she herself sincerely wanted more than anything.

"If I get in at the bye-election, it's a beginning, even if it's only the beginning of a flop. The point is, there's a snag. My fault — I was a fool to let 'em have our address. To cut it short, the agent didn't quite say he knew we were not married, but he made it perfectly clear that if I am to represent Charbury in Parliament —"

"I'll have all my things out of the flat by midday tomorrow."

"Don't interrupt so, Mabel! Before I left, I 'phoned the firm's solicitors to get a special license so that we can be married right away."

A small sound escaped from Mabel, which Broughby did not realize was a moan of frustration. Here was the call back to the comfort, security, and respectability which she had thrown away six years ago, but had since learned to value. And the call had to come today!

"That is, if you will," added Broughby. "You will marry me, won't you?" Then he added quickly: "But of course you will!"

She was not sure that it was more than a passing notion of his.

"All my life, George dear, I shall remember with happiness that you asked me. But —"

" 'Angel voices off-stage'!" snorted Broughby. "It's a practical proposition."

Still cautious, she began to look at it from his angle. It was part of her genius that she could say the sort of things his mother would have said to him.

"It isn't practical to marry a woman with a past, as my father politely called it."

"But you have been frank — and that takes the sting out of it. You can make a job of a politician's wife, if you put your mind to it. Your stage experience will come in useful. Self-possession. No blushing and stammer-

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ing in public. Besides, what am I to do when I come home if you're not there?"

He had worked it all out in a couple of minutes before ringing for the special license. He had faced the drawbacks and made his decision. He had not guessed that *she* might be the one to hesitate.

"George darling! You're giving a birthday party for me. You have asked men only. Because you don't like the only kind of women you could ask to meet me."

"We could ask any kind of women if we were married." He glanced with distaste at the wedding ring on her finger; he had bought it alone and given it to her in a taxi.

"It would mean such a change for us both," she objected, half-heartedly. "Let's make a tremendous effort to be sensible about each other — and tomorrow we'll say goodbye without regrets on either side."

Regrets? Possibly not. Instead, a gnawing ache in his nervous system — a shabby kind of self-reproach that he had thrown away a bubbling essence of vitality that was beyond good and evil, beyond stupidity and wisdom. Her lovers of the past meant nothing — her imagined lovers of the future were already torturing him with their laughter at the fool who preferred mouthing platitudes from a platform to possessing a woman like her.

"Don't choose for me, Mabel — I know what I'm doing. You're safe with drink. You know when not to make a silly joke or tell an off-color story. And — if you want me to say it — I'd miss you like hell!"

Because he had been a hell of a long time finding her. In some ways she was an awful little vulgarian, but she had given him a kind of friendship which he had glimpsed at Eton, missed at Magdalen, and had given up hope of attaining in London. She nourished his self-confidence, leaving him uncomfortably dependent on her.

"What about it?" he demanded.

Evidently he had thought out the objections and knew his own mind. She must play for time — only a very little time — until her suspicions of Crendon's American were settled one way or the other.

"Please, George! My head is full of the party — six of us, all told, unless you've asked anybody else? Give me till tomorrow morning — and let's go on today as if nothing had happened."

"I suppose I'll have to . . . but when the license turns up I'll carry you along and if you don't want to go through with it, you can tell 'em when we get there."

George really wanted to marry her. For a moment — a long moment — that thought filled her universe. Then she shut her mind, saying casually: "Will you take some chairs on deck, George? I can manage the drinks."

He adopted her attitude. "I have to see the boathouse manager. The others will be here at any minute. They'll like to be asked to do a job of work."

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She finished the cocktail glasses and checked them. Six — including herself and the unknown American. If he really was unknown! She began to arrange flowers in a copper bowl which clashed with her hair. Her hands were trembling, but she steadied them when she heard a footstep.

Charles Hardelow was the first arrival.

Hardelow was a chartered accountant, a partner in his father's firm in the most exclusive part of Victoria Street. He was a sleek little man who could not help looking rather tailored, even when wearing flannels and a blazer. Kindly, generous, easy-going, one would suspect that he was bullied by his gardener and mothered by his wife. Yet he had dared brilliantly and enjoyed his hour of triumph, on which his imagination would feed for the rest of his life.

"Charlie! How lovely to see you again!" Mabel kissed him on the cheek. "Marriage is good for you, dear — do you know you've actually become chubby?"

"Can't fight heredity!" Even his voice was the voice of a man who will eventually be fat. "And you are as much of a sylph as ever."

"How can you tell, through this overall? Charlie, who is the American Harold Crendon is bringing?"

"First I've heard of him. I haven't brought you a birthday present."

"It doesn't matter. If you're hard up, I can do something for you." She might yet fall between two stools, so she could lose nothing by building up reserves. "I've got hold of a play — an absolutely certain winner! — everybody says so! There's a sure-fire scene where I pluck off my wedding ring — 'The symbol of a lie'! I say, and throw it —"

"My sweet, I didn't bring you a birthday present because, four years ago, your birthday was on November the twentieth."

"I remember — a Saturday! With one of the very worst fogs, and we were both so depressed until we found it was my birthday. And then we had a gorgeous time and very nearly lived happily ever afterwards."

Hardelow winced, as if the words had hurt him.

"You little devil, darling — leave me alone now, won't you?" An intensity had crept into his voice and his round cheeks seemed to lose some of their plumpness. "I'm fond of my wife and I intend to play straight with her."

"Those are the most beautiful words I've ever heard you say, Charlie." The veiled contralto rippled down his spine: from a mist of dark copper the blue eyes adored him for his probity. In that moment he forgave himself for all his failures and saw himself as he wished to be. No one but Mabel could make him feel like that.

"Here comes someone else — I'll tell you about the play later on — I know you'll jump at it. Oh, it's Frank Millard!"

"Broughby sent me on to chaperon you." Frank Millard, a member

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of the Stock Exchange, suggested a poet rather than a stockbroker — lean and bony, with large, deceptively dreamy eyes and a melodious voice.

"Frank, do you know anything about the American Harold Crendon is bringing?" She added one of her innocent little lies that so often caused so much trouble. "He saw me on the floor at the Rialto and wanted to meet me. What's his name? Is he nice?"

"You mean, sweetheart, is he rich? I don't know. If he is, Crendon will have warned him about you — also, if he's poor."

"She wants to tell him about a play," chuckled Hardelow. He went out to the deck and gazed at the river, seeing nothing. That play — she would infect him with the belief that it would be a genuine investment. He would, of course, lose more money on it than he could afford. Worse — the rush and scramble of backing a play would keep him in touch with her — the very thing he didn't want. He had built his life on the premise that, in any meaningful sense, he had forgotten her. He knew now that he had not forgotten her in any sense at all. He had been a fool to accept Broughby's invitation. If only he could think of some excuse for running home!

In the saloon, Mabel had removed the overall. Millard was telling himself that, though her colors did not match, the discords were resolved into an harmonious aura — or if it wasn't harmonious, it was certainly an aura. He produced a small parcel.

"Happy birthday, Mabel!"

She tore the wrapping from the jeweler's box and took out a gemmed brooch.

"Emeralds! Oh, Frank — that afternoon in Edinburgh!" She pinned the brooch on her green jumper — another color clash. "How dear of you to remember!"

"I've tried to forget." It was no gallantry but a bitter protest.

"To forget *me*, Frank?"

"I've tried to think of you as a girl I had a gorgeous time with — but it won't work. The girl keeps turning back into you."

"But, dear, we finished and parted, liking each other better than ever."

"*You* finished! But I never pretended to myself that I did."

"It will pass, Frank. Look at Charlie Hardelow. He's happily married. And I like to think he learned a tiny bit from me that helps him to be a good husband."

"I know you think that way — that's what does the damage. I shall never be happily married. Dammit, there is a girl I want to marry! I keep not-asking her, because I daren't think what I would do if you were to ask me to start again."

"I never would do a beastly thing like that!"

"I know. But it doesn't prevent me from imagining that you might — or hoping that you will."

"But, dear boy, I've told you!"

"You've told me that you don't want a repetition. Nor do I. Last time, we were hectic about it — we

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snatched excitedly at a passing happiness. You're doing it again now, with Broughby. It can't last. You don't really like this restless, happy-go-lucky existence. There's more genuine freedom in the suburbs than in Bohemia — and we both know it. I could make a marriage settlement —"

From the deck came a whoop from Hardelow, then footsteps on the landing stage. Broughby was returning, accompanied by Crendon and his American friend.

As the American came into her line of vision, Mabel caught her breath. Of all the millions and millions of men in America it had to be this one! But, of course, he had contrived the meeting — might well have come to England for just that purpose.

"Mabel, meet Mr. Stranack — Miss Rouse."

He had not changed in six years, she thought. He must be nearly 40 now, but he was as springy as ever and his face still looked as if the skin had been stretched over it. He even seemed to have grown; but that was only because he was bigger than Broughby, who was bigger than the others. Alone of the party he was wearing a lounge suit, which fitted him so well that he managed to look as informal as the others.

She was steady as a rock through those first exchanges. He wished to be treated as a stranger — or perhaps he was waiting for her to take the first step. Perhaps he was merely anxious not to spoil the party. She might have guessed that he would never make a scene. Anyhow, he meant to give her a breathing space, which was something to be thankful for.

Broughby took Stranack off to show him the launch. Millard joined Hardelow on deck, leaving Crendon to pay his respects to Mabel.

Harold Crendon was a barrister. After dawdling for a few years in the criminal courts he had emerged as the best junior counsel for insurance litigation. In his middle thirties, he was already wondering whether it would pay him to take silk. Of middle size, he had broad shoulders and a broad face, with a large nose and a prominent chin. His personality had been attuned by nature to a law court: elsewhere, it gave the impression of being overgrown, as if the man himself could think only in superlatives.

He bore down upon Mabel, took her by the hand, and snapped a diamond bracelet on her wrist.

"I ordered it for you two years ago, but you walked out on me before it was delivered."

"Harold!" The veiled contralto registered pain. Tears had come into her eyes. Such was her power of concentrating on the emotion of the moment that the whole problem of Broughby and Stranack shrank into the background. "I walked out because I thought you were tiring of me."

"What utter rot!"

She was looking at the bracelet as if it had betrayed her. She had been moved by this man as by no other, and was again feeling his magnetism.

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"This very minute you've made me understand. I didn't know it was rot at the time."

"I have to suggest that you soon consoled yourself?"

"Soon? There was six months of real misery."

His self-assurance was unshaken. To gain time he blustered.

"Will you have the goodness to sit down and give me your whole attention . . ."

"I can't sit down — I've things to do. And there's nothing for either of us to say. I couldn't mope for the rest of my life. So why not George Broughby? He's a dear and I'm fond of him. But I can't go on with it — not now!"

He glowered at her. She dropped onto a divan as if she had been flung there.

"You little fool — it's too late!" he said, with sudden anger. "I've just got engaged to be married."

"Then you have lost nothing. I'm glad!" Then she added, with that curious air of sincerity, "I hope your fiancée knows she's lucky."

He stood over her, pointing at her.

"I really thought you had walked out on me. Why did you deny it?" He went on: "You had no right to tell me the truth. You're selfish, mean, and cruel. So am I, I suppose. You have all my weaknesses and most of my vices, and if I had any sense I'd be thankful to you for letting go. As it is —"

"*Shh!* Don't get so worked up, darling. You'll be able to forget when you start a new life with her. Thank you ever so much for this lovely bracelet."

"Shut up! It would not be fair to my fiancée to go on with our engagement now. That's easily said, but it settles nothing. We have to find a way out of this mess you've landed us in — and at present I can see no way."

There sounded the whirr of the starter, then the low purr of the engine ticking over.

Broughby came into the cabin.

"I say, Crendon, will you take us out as far as the Pool so that I can help Mabel get things started?" As Crendon nodded and moved to the door, Broughby said, "And thanks for bringing Stranack. He's more than welcome!"

Mabel sensed that Broughby had something on his mind, and remembered uneasily that he had been alone with Stranack.

"Stranack is the right sort," he said, lowering his voice. "But, being American, some of our little ways may seem strange to him — meaning your little ways, darling. So be careful not to give him a wrong impression."

"What's the right impression George?"

"That you and I —"

"But you promised we'd say nothing about us today!"

"That you and I might be considering the idea of getting married. Put that truth over in a form which he will accept. A little unconventionality won't hurt, but — you know exactly what I mean, Mabel!"

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He was warning her not to make a *faux pas* in the presence of Arthur Stranack. That was funny, she thought, and she laughed a little, but without enjoyment because she was becoming nervous. The throb of the engines quickened. The launch had put off with its party of six intelligent, law-abiding persons.

Things, thought Mabel, could sometimes take a shape of their own — as if they were trying to warn you, though you couldn't do anything about it. She had the eerie feeling that all the events of the last six years were running up behind her, and that when they reached her they would explode. George asking her to marry him at the very moment almost when Arthur Stranack popped up — it must mean something.

Then, too, Harold Crendon had behaved very strangely, talking about breaking off his engagement. Being a professional talker, he always made everything seem so urgent. The other two didn't matter so much. Charlie Hardelow often got excited about nothing and Frank rather liked having something to be sad about.

The eeriness began to fade while she was loading the tray. After all, what was she afraid of? That somebody might make a fuss and embarrass the others? Or that five of her friends might suddenly turn into five enemies?

As she approached the companionway to the deck, she felt stage fright. The tray was very heavy — she doubted whether she could carry it.

"Allow me, Miss Rouse."

"Thank you, Mr. Stranack. It's heavier than I thought."

There was neither threat nor promise in his glance. Why, she wondered, had he contrived this meeting?

At the Tower of London, Broughby took the wheel from Crendon. Mr. Stranack remarked to Miss Rouse that it was a grand old pile, and Miss Rouse made the trite answer. The other men noted that Mabel was behaving nicely, that the American was not englamored — which they thought a very satisfactory circumstance for all concerned.

Crendon, joining the party on deck, managed to corner Mabel.

"I may as well tell you I've got an idea." He spoke as if he were still angry with her. "I haven't worked out the details — but still, it's an idea. I'll tell you about it later."

Crendon, she told herself, might be the flash point for the explosion. But what explosion? Since she could not marry Broughby, she would have to leave him tomorrow. What harm could there be in Crendon making plans? The eerie feeling came back — but she had often had that sort of feeling without anything dire happening.

Ignoring the growing heat of the day, she flitted restlessly from deck to saloon and back again. While they were passing through the Port of London the men chattered to each other about the shipping — all a little too polite, she thought. Below Tilbury, Hardelow took his turn at the

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wheel. When Broughby came on deck, Mabel handed him a cocktail. His eyes asked her why the party was dying on its feet.

Mabel was fast losing her head. As usual on these difficult occasions, her thoughts retreated into fantasy. Suppose Arthur Stranack were to fall overboard? Everything would then be so much simpler. What an awful thought! Arthur was the kindest man on earth — and besides, he was a strong swimmer. Then suppose they all had a frightful quarrel, with guns and things! But again that wouldn't be any good unless poor Arthur were killed, which would be horribly unfair. The real trouble-maker was Harold Crendon, but it wouldn't help much if *he* —

She jerked herself back to reality. At least, there was no need to go on wondering what Arthur Stranack meant to do. She caught his eye, held it, then glanced significantly below. Presently he went below. Within a minute, she picked up a tray and followed.

He was lounging in an armchair and did not rise until she had come close.

"Are you happy, Mabel? If the answer is yes, I'll fade out."

All shyness of him left her. She answered with a spontaneity she had not intended.

"I don't know. I suppose I am. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Why didn't you divorce me before I left the States?"

"I told you I would divorce you the moment you asked me, but not before. Why didn't you ask me?"

"I don't know."

"I do, Mabel. And it's all come true. I *have* sought you out. And now I'm going to say it — and mean it. Ready? I'm sorry for my 50 per cent share in wrecking our marriage. In the past six years I've learned how not to make some of those mistakes. I want you to come back to me. Clean slate for both of us."

He certainly was the kindest man on earth — but she had been hoping he would be unkind. It would have been easier that way.

"Now you've made me utterly miserable!" She realized now that she had wasted six years and spoiled herself for him, out of pique. "It wouldn't work, Arthur. All you know about me is that I've been what is commonly called unfaithful to you, and you're willing to forget it. But there are rotten streaks in me you know nothing about. Look — I accept jewelry!" She flashed Crendon's bracelet beside Millard's brooch. "And money, too, if you must know! In a a way, I loot my friends."

"You didn't loot me. You knew I had a hundred thousand dollars in gilt-edged. It's still there. If there's any of it left when we've paid those men back, you can wangle it out of me." He added: "Just now, I'm in the diplomatic service, but I can get a transfer if you don't feel you could manage that sort of life."

"I'm trying to be sensible and you won't let me!" For a few seconds she

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wavered. "It's no good, Arthur. You're forgiving and kind and gentle and insanely generous — but I couldn't live up to it. You would keep your part of the bargain, but I don't trust myself to keep mine. I'd hurt you all over again — and hate myself for being so mean."

He made no answer, looked as if he were paying no attention.

She went on: "Divorce me and have done with it! But don't involve Broughby — he's going to stand for Parliament. I'll sign a confession. It'll be done in America, of course. And over here no one need know we were ever married. I mean, in effect, we are both free."

When he spoke, he made no reference to her words.

"Think it over, Mabel." His voice was gentle beyond bearing.

To escape from him, she hurried back to the deck. He followed her closely. They were just in time to see a sailing yacht run across the fairway of the motorboat. The boat rolled as Hardelow brought the wheel over. Stranack caught Mabel and steadied her.

He was still holding her when the bow of the *Astarte* struck the soft mud of the Essex bank. At the impact they swayed, then steadied. As if they were alone together, Mabel stood on tiptoe and pressed her mouth to his.

"God, I wish I hadn't done that!" she gasped. "You see how rotten I am, Arthur — I meant not to!"

Broughby took control. Hardelow, running about in search of a sympathetic audience, fixed on Mabel. As a matter of routine, the dinghy was lowered and Crendon got in it, pottered round the bow, and confirmed the obvious. Everybody went aft, for counterpoise, while Broughby tried to pull clear by reversing. But the bow was too firmly wedged. A dozen feet from the bow the mud sloped upwards from the water to the verge of the marshland. When it was certain that the boat was undamaged, Broughby summed up.

"We could signal for a tug, but it might be the devil of a time, to say nothing of the hullabaloo, before we get one." He flourished a tide table. "If we stay put, the incoming tide should float us off in two and a half hours. What does everybody think?"

"Lunch! As soon as I've got over the shock," said Mabel, helping herself to a second gin of generous proportions.

The lunch began very well. The mishap to the boat had broken the reserve which had threatened to freeze the party. Everybody did something and everything turned out to be rather amusing, even locking the little tables together to make a big table and unpacking the caterer's basket.

The first hitch came with the cold chicken.

"George! Those wretched people haven't carved the fowls. I can't carve and you aren't really good at it. Harold, you look as if you could carve!"

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"I know I do — and it's given me a complex."

"Why not take a chance on me?" offered Stranack. "I wasted two years on a medical course in the belief that I was meant to be a surgeon."

Mabel's joy was exaggerated. "George, give him your chair. Oh, but we haven't a carving knife!"

"I can scare up something that'll do," said Broughby and went out.

"It hurts to hear that you can't carve, Mabel," said Hardelow. "I believed you had all the domestic accomplishments and virtues."

"I might have a dab at the accomplishments," replied Mabel, "but the rest of it sounds much too difficult."

Crendon sniggered. Millard scowled at Hardelow. Mabel never said that kind of thing unless some lout goaded her to a retort.

Broughby returned and handed Stranack an ugly-looking instrument. It was a short butcher's knife. It had a black wooden handle and a broad-based blade.

"This is better than a fancy carver," said Stranack as he used it with a deftness which inspired Mabel to lyrical enthusiasm — a state from which she did not depart. She became noisy, and the party liked it — joyous nonsense put over with a vitality that evoked willing response.

She was, in fact, too successful too early in the lunch. When spontaneity flagged, she made more intensive efforts. Jollity slipped away and thought crept in. Thought just now was rather more than she could manage. Again and again her eyes rested on Stranack. By that impulsive kiss on deck, she had further confused her values. The eerie feeling was coming back, and she sought refuge in boisterousness.

One of her jokes approached the limit, and one overstepped it. The men, except Broughby, cackled politely, but their faces lengthened. So far, nothing had happened which could not be forgotten, but they had a lively fear that she might cause a moment of acute embarrassment. Each man secretly blamed one of the others for egging her on — then thought uneasily of his own feelings for her.

Stranack was hearing the echo of her words of an hour ago: "*It wouldn't work, Arthur.*" Millard was glad she had refused his offer to settle down with him in the suburbs. Crendon's eye was caught by the bracelet flashing on her wrist: he wished he had not been so definite about breaking off his engagement — Mabel might think he meant to marry her. Broughby was thinking of his Parliamentary career, thankful that no announcement had been made to the others.

Crendon alone made an attempt to come to her rescue.

"Silence everybody!" he shouted with mock solemnity. "It's Mabel's birthday. I've prepared a nice little speech about her and I intend to deliver it."

"Keep it clean!" chirped Mabel.

" 'Keep it clean,' " parried Crendon, "is the slogan which this gallant

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lady adopted when she decided to become a professional entertainer. As Cherry Dane she wins admiration for her gracefulness and her beauty. She plays for the hearty and wholesome laugh — she does not play for the facile guffaw. On the threshold of her career in the theatre, the one thing she asks — the one thing she is determined to have — is —"

"*Marriage!*" exclaimed Mabel.

The moment of acute embarrassment had come. In the silence, she added: "That was what you meant, wasn't it, Harold?"

The ambiguity of her words, which might have applied to his own intentions, disconcerted Crendon. Hardelow, the least affected, jumped in.

"He thinks you're proposing to him, my dear. Mind he doesn't say 'yes' and make himself the happiest man on earth."

"Charlie! I'd forgotten my promise to you about that play. Let's tell them about it, now that Harold has finished his speech. And a very nice speech too, only he ought to have stood up."

As she attempted to rise, one leg of her chair fouled a socket in the floor. Frank Millard, unaware of this, took a firm grip, intending only to steady her. But Mabel thought he was trying to hold her down.

"Don't!" she cried. "Surely I can say a few words to the company on my own birthday!" She made a scuffle of it. By ill luck the bracelet Crendon had given her scraped the back of Millard's hand.

"Frank — I'm terribly sorry! Oh, it's bleeding — mind your trousers! Quick, George — the First Aid kit!"

"The patient is expected to recover," said Millard. "It's all right, dear — it'll stop in a minute. My fault entirely!"

Mabel couldn't leave it at that. She elaborated her apology; she crooned over the trifling injury; she skidded into sheer silliness.

Broughby took her by the elbows, marched her across the saloon, and carried her up the companionway. By the wheelhouse he set her on her feet and opened the door of the corridor.

"George, dear, I'm not drunk, if that's in your mind."

"It's in my mind that you've forgotten what I told you about behaving yourself in front of Stranack."

She laughed loudly. He shuffled her down the corridor and opened the door of her cabin.

"I warned you I wasn't a fit wife for a rising politician."

"And I was fool enough to contradict you."

So she need not bother any more about marrying George Broughby, decided Mabel.

"You weren't a fool, George, dear. I thought it a perfectly charming way of saying goodbye."

Broughby weakened. He was angry and disgusted with her, and only a moment ago he had hoped never to see her after tomorrow. She would not cling, nor wait to be paid off, like some others. She would blow him a

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kiss and dance out of his life, leaving behind her a fragrance that would linger for years and smother the memory of her witless vulgarities.

In the saloon Stranack was bandaging Millard's hand. Hardelow affected to be reading a book. Crendon was sprawling on a divan contemplating his shoes. The party had disintegrated. If the guests had been able to do so, they would have made excuses to leave.

Broughby had brought the crockery basket in with him. When the others perceived its purpose they were excessively anxious to help. The dining table was reduced to its component parts.

Broughby picked up the crockery basket, carried it back to the galley for the eventual attention of the contractor's staff. The butcher's knife, because it had to be handled gingerly, had been dealt with last — so it remained at the top, ready to the hand of anyone who might glance into the galley on his way down the passage.

In the corridor he hesitated. Perhaps he had been needlessly offensive to Mabel. Might make some kind of apology. Fathead! he warned himself. She is willing to fade out — leave well alone. At best she would only be a handicap.

Intending to go back to the saloon, he nevertheless turned round and knocked on Mabel's door, which was shut.

"Got everything you want?"

"Yes, thanks. I'll be quite rested by tea time."

From her voice he judged that she was standing close to the door. She ought to be lying down, by now. Hell! Concentrate on the bye-election and forget her.

Before returning to the saloon he went on deck to take observations, which revealed nothing new. Going below, he found Stranack hovering by the wheelhouse.

"I've forgotten where to go to wash up."

"Through that door, down the corridor — last door on the right."

Stranack entered the corridor, shutting the door behind him. When he had taken a few steps, he had an oblique view of her orange-satin slip — all she was wearing — and a bare arm; Mabel's door was now open.

He would have continued on his way if he had been permitted.

"Arthur!" she called.

As their eyes met, she smiled. She was lying on the coverlet, propped on one arm. And all she was wearing was a slip.

"I ought to have kept the door shut, but it's so hot — I forgot everybody would be going past." She was flushed and more than a little bedraggled. One shoulder strap had sagged. Her skirt lay on the floor, beside it her jumper, with the brooch still pinned to it. On the bed, out of her line of vision, was a shoe. There was a rip in one of her stockings.

"Do you want me to shut the door?" he asked.

Waiting for her answer, he let his eye travel from her chin to her throat

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to her shoulders, and come to rest on the diamond bracelet.

"Crendon gave it to me." She unclipped it and thrust it under the pillows. "I'll give it back to him the very first chance I get — I'll give back all my jewelry."

"Why?"

His voice was cold and his eyes showed disillusion. Mabel ignored the warning.

"Arthur!" She rolled his name on her tongue. "I talked a lot of nonsense this morning. Your offer took me by surprise and I wanted to run away and think. But on deck — when I felt your arm round me — I knew I must come back. I'll leave Broughby as soon as we get off this boat."

She plucked the wedding ring from her finger, held it as if to let an audience have a good look at it.

" 'The symbol of a lie!' " She flung it across the cabin. "I have the real one locked away — the one you gave me, Arthur."

It was characteristic of Mabel that she had to tell the truth that was in her by means of a ham performance, gagged from a bad scene in a poor play, which would have cost Charles Hardelow more than he could afford — if it had ever been put on the stage.

The *Astarte* remained aground for some 40 minutes after Stranack had rejoined the others in the saloon.

At Westminster Pier, the still air magnified the vibrations of Big Ben booming half-past 5. Broughby left the wheelhouse as Inspector Kyle stepped aboard, followed by Sergeant Dobson. The two plainclothesmen remained on the pier, mounting guard on the *Astarte* so unobtrusively that the passersby on the Embankment were unaware that police were taking action.

"Your note says that murder has been committed on this yacht, Mr. Broughby?" Kyle spoke as if he thought there might have been some mistake.

"That's right." Broughby led them into the corridor, past the galley to the cabin that had been Mabel's.

"Behind that door," he said and pointed to a narrow strip of paper secured at each end with a postage stamp. "That's the best I could do for a seal — the signature is mine."

"Then there are other people on this boat?"

"Four other men. They're in the saloon. I thought you'd want to come here first." He produced a key. "My fingerprints will be on the handle and all over the door. Shall I open it?"

"I'll do that," said Kyle. The Sergeant handed him a folded silk handkerchief.

"Press the lever and slide the door to your left."

On the bed, Kyle saw the body of a woman in an orange-satin slip. Her head, throat, and part of her chest were covered with a green jumper, bloodstained. From the green jumper protruded the black handle of a knife whose blade, by inference, was sunk in her throat.

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Court histories and political biographies record that more than one woman like Mabel has met violent death in just such an impromptu manner. That green jumper had been used solely because it happened to be handy. The emerald brooch, which Millard had given her, dangled on a loosened strand. One shoe was still on the bed. The tartan skirt lay on the floor where Mabel herself had let it fall.

Kyle's eyes traveled to the bare arms above the head, noted that the fingers were ringless; the eyes roamed slowly round the cabin, then returned to the black handle of the knife. It was obviously the kind that could be bought at any ironmonger's.

"Do you know anything about that knife, Mr. Broughby?"

From where Broughby was standing he could not see into the cabin. He did not move. He did not want to see the inside of that cabin ever again.

"The knife is part of the galley equipment, though we used it today in the saloon." He explained that it had been placed in the basket on top of the unwashed crockery. "Anyone who happened to glance into the galley could have seen it."

Kyle noted the answer, but made no comment. Presently he asked: "You know who deceased is, of course?"

"Mabel Rouse — professional name, Cherry Dane." He gave an address and added: "She did floor shows and bit parts. I can tell you a good deal about her when you're ready for it."

Kyle glanced again at the ringless fingers.

"Was she married or single?"

"Single. At least I have strong reason for believing so. If she has ever been married, she must have had a divorce." He added: "She said she was twenty-eight — which was about right. I'd better mention that I was running a flat for her — the address I gave you. I bought her that wedding ring."

Kyle studied the fingers a third time and for the third time observed that they were ringless. Too soon to go into that.

"Can you give me some idea how it happened, Mr. Broughby?"

"Yes, but we must have the others in on that. Will you come and meet them?" He added: "We intended to run down the river to Southend regatta." He reported the mishap.

Kyle turned to Sergeant Dobson.

"Take charge here. The team will be along in a couple of minutes. I shall be in the saloon."

Following Broughby, Kyle stopped by the wheelhouse and beckoned to the nearer of the two plainclothesmen.

"No one is to leave the launch," he instructed.

Broughby opened doors disclosing the companionway leading down to the saloon.

"Here is Detective Inspector Kyle of Scotland Yard."

The four men rose, not as one man

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but as four highly individualized persons. They had the air of men who had suffered a sudden bereavement, to which was added the slightly smug expression which commonly settles upon the innocent when they come under police scrutiny.

Broughby introduced them, adding information he deemed of interest to the police.

"Mr. Harold Crendon, barrister-at-law, Western Circuit, chambers in Lincolns Inn. Mr. Frank Millard, member of the Stock Exchange, Millard and Bush, Copthall Avenue. Mr. Charles Hardelow, chartered accountant, partner in his father's firm in Victoria Street. Mr. Stranack —" Broughby hesitated. "I'm afraid I don't know anything about Mr. Stranack except that he is a friend of Crendon's, and that he's a citizen of the United States."

"He's in the diplomatic service," supplied Crendon. "Quartered at the Embassy."

"As I'm a foreigner, Inspector, you'll want to see my papers." Stranack drew from his breast pocket what looked like an ordinary passport, but was not. Kyle scanned it, checked the photograph with the original, and handed it back.

"Mr. Stranack, I have to detain everybody here for questioning. If you wish to claim diplomatic immunity —"

"I wish to claim nothing, Inspector," said the American. "You may take it that I shall not communicate with the Embassy until you're finished with me."

"Thank you, Mr. Stranack." There was a pause. Kyle was waiting for Broughby. He glanced round the saloon, becoming aware of its size — it would hold 30 guests without squashing.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm waiting for one of you to tell me what happened and how the killer managed to get away from the five of you."

Another long silence followed, in which he had the impression that each was waiting for another to speak.

"He hasn't got away," said Broughby. "He's here — one of us in this saloon killed her. We don't know which one.

"One of us is the murderer," Broughby repeated. "And theoretically that includes me."

(*Continued on page 125*)

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

With this issue, September 1955, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine begins its 15th year of publication. . . . And to help celebrate our anniversary we have chosen for this issue a very special story. For one thing, it is a prize-winner from EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest — last year's; secondly, it introduces to EQMM the talented newcomer, Nedra Tyre, whose first detective novel, MOUSE IN ETERNITY, *was a sensation in 1952; and last, but decidedly not least, this 15th anniversary story concerns the Father of the Modern Detective Story — and who is more deserving of honor on any detectival anniversary than the originator himself, Edgar Allan Poe?*

Nedra Tyre's unusual story takes place in the Edgar Allan Poe Shrine in Richmond, Virginia. It deals (seemingly) with the murder of Edgar Allan Poe himself, and (again seemingly) the murderer is one "Gus" Dupin. But keep your private eye on the lecturer, guide, and curator of the Shrine, tired little Miss Wilson: it is she who, with the spirit of Poe to inspire her, makes sense out of nonsense.

A few words about the author: Nedra Tyre was born in Georgia, was graduated from the University of Georgia, took her master's degree at Emory University, and subsequently studied at the Richmond School of Social Work, College of William and Mary. She has been active in public-welfare and social work for a number of years — but not so active that she didn't find time, originally as pure relaxation, to become one of the best read and best informed 'tec fans: When she turned from reading to writing, she revealed her considerable talents in her very first detective novel. As Anthony Boucher has reminded us, Nedra Tyre's own detective-character unconsciously described his creator: She seems to have "a photographic memory. Not that exactly, but [she] remembers the way people say things and what they say and do. She remembers atmosphere."

Nedra Tyre's first mystery novel was followed by DEATH OF AN INTRUDER *(1953) and* JOURNEY TO NOWHERE *(1954). All three books had their hard-cover editions published by Alfred A. Knopf, and all three were "hailed with loud cheers" by critics the country over.*

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MURDER AT THE POE SHRINE

by NEDRA TYRE

THE LAST VISITOR OF THE DAY HAD just left the Edgar Allan Poe Shrine in Richmond, Virginia.

Miss Wilson, the Shrine's lecturer, guide, and curator, went to the small table where the brochures and post cards were displayed; she rearranged them into neat stacks: *A Walk Around the Edgar Allan Poe Shrine*, *Historic Guide to Richmond and James River*, the colored reproductions of the Old Stone House and garden; the black and white prints of the daguerreotype made of Poe when he had gone to Providence in November 1848 on a frantic lover's visit to Mrs. Helen Whitman, one of the numerous Helens in his life.

Miss Wilson sat down at the desk where all the guests registered. She was exhausted; there had been an unusual number of visitors that Sunday afternoon; the pace had been hectic and tiring; she had barely been able to get one person or group on its way through the Old Stone House, the garden, and the Memorial Building, before the bell at the front door had rung and she had to rush back to admit others, collect their entrance fees, and start them on their rounds. The number of guests had been uncommonly large because an instructor at one of the local colleges had assigned a visit to the Poe Shrine as one of the requirements for a course in American literature, and many students in the turtle-like completion of their summer school work had waited until the last day before their reports were due to visit the Memorial.

Miss Wilson was tired, but pleasantly so; she had a sense of accomplishment. At the end of every day she felt good that a number of people had for the first time in their lives seen mementoes connected with Poe; had looked at manuscripts written in his beautiful, meticulous handwriting; had touched furniture that had been in the Allan household where he had had his precarious tenancy; had examined the trunk that had accompanied him on so many of his sad wanderings; had glanced at the desk he had used as editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger;* had seen the cane he had carried with such an air of elegance; and in the display case had viewed the precious edition of his first published work, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (By A Bostonian).

There were several small tasks she had to do before she could go home — chiefly the closing of windows and locking of doors.

The Shrine consists of the Old Stone House, the garden, and the Memorial Building. She left the Old Stone House and walked into the garden. In the springtime the flowers Poe loved were planted there, among

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them the two she thought were especially appropriate, *forget-me-nots* and heart's-ease. Poe . . . who would never be forgotten so long as the love of literature persisted, and whose own heart had never known ease.

Her brisk steps then took her to the Memorial Building. She did not go upstairs in that building except at the end of each day's work; the stairs were steep and it was too long a walk from there to the Old Stone House when the bell rang announcing new callers.

As she ascended the staircase she looked up at Carling's series of illustrations in India ink for *The Raven;* they embodied for her the spirit of the poem, so long worked upon and finally completed at the Brennan home on Bloomingdale Road in New York City.

When she got to the head of the stairs she stopped to catch her breath. At this time every day she often reviewed what had happened. Today had been perfect, she thought; though it was still summer the late August days were borrowing their flavor more and more from autumn; it was a day streaked with shadow and sunshine and quick winds, a day that might have come from Poe's lonesome October or even the bleak December that had always haunted him.

Miss Wilson looked across the room at the head of the stairs. Her glance stopped at Ellen Glasgow's photograph, signed in her distinctive writing. She considered handwriting and wondered if it really were an index of character; she thought of the handwritten specimens of Poe on exhibit at the Shrine, all that careful, painstaking formation of letters. But there were other examples, written in times of distress and despair, when Poe's writing had wavered and wandered, like some hastily scrawled signpost to madness. Certainly she was more than ordinarily interested in handwriting; often when she had time she went over the signatures of the visitors who had registered in the guest book; handwriting was so intimately connected with a person, it must, she felt, have deep significance. She had even sent off a specimen of her own to a graphologist for comment; the answer had been on the whole pleasant but rather noncommittal; what had delighted her was the mention of her powers of analysis. Poe would have approved of that, she thought; he had emphasized that particular quality in his four detective stories.

But her thoughts were making her dawdle. This dilly-dallying had to be stopped. She must look briefly into the room where the rest of *The Raven* illustrations hung, the raven itself was mounted and set on a dark table, and where the bust of Pallas sat, if not quite above the chamber door — that line had given them some trouble — at least on a stand near the door.

On the threshold Miss Wilson stopped.

"Why, Mr. Poe," she said.

Her feet would not settle on the floor; they stood uncertainly on tiptoe while fingers of fear pricked at her neck.

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In the late afternoons when she had the Shrine to herself like this she had often felt in communion with Poe. But then, she told herself, people were often in communion with the dead: the reader of Shakespeare, the viewer of paintings by Klee or Cézanne — whoever looks with a receptive heart at the works of artists no longer living is in communion with the dead.

"Mr. Poe," she said again, her fear changing to curiosity.

Because Edgar A. Poe himself sat at the table.

His hair was done in the style shown in the familiar daguerreotype; everything about him was like that picture — his mustache, his cravat, his neat clothes. His arms were stretched out, his head was bent forward, and he stared with a most horrible expression.

Miss Wilson walked toward him, then backstepped to turn on the light switch.

A more distinct view merely confirmed what was before her.

Edgar A. Poe was in fact sitting at the table; he had a heavy cord around his neck and the cord was tied to the back of the chair in such a way as to keep him from toppling. Just out of his reach on the table stood the raven.

She wanted to shriek, to run, to dissolve into hysteria. Her gaze would not leave Poe and her mind had stopped functioning.

"Margaret Ellen Wilson," she commanded, "control yourself!"

With tremendous effort she deserted Edgar Allan Poe and returned to the Old Stone House.

No one could have entered that afternoon without paying the entrance fee and signing the register. Whatever her tormented brain was inclined to think, Edgar A. Poe could *not* be in the upstairs room of the Memorial Building. Whoever was there had deliberately masqueraded as Poe but his right name or an assumed name must be in the guest book.

Darkness had claimed the Old Stone House. Miss Wilson turned on the lamp near the register. She fluttered through the book until she came to the page beginning with the visitors on that Sunday afternoon in August. Her eyes sought and then would not go beyond two entries:

Eddie Poe, Main Street,
Richmond, Virginia
Gus Dupin, Faubourg St.
Germain, Paris

She felt the healthy emotion of justified indignation. Not even Edgar A. Poe; not even C. Auguste Dupin. Eddie and Gus. Gay, flippant hoaxers had written that — arrant leg-pullers committing a schoolboy's prank.

But murder was no hoax. Death by violence was no prank.

This might mean ruin for the Shrine, she thought frantically; at best it would mean notoriety; but as a citizen she had no choice. Her finger ran down the telephone book until she reached *Police Department*. She went to the telephone and dialed the

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number listed. When there was an answer her message was on the verge of hysteria . . .

While she waited for the police she copied out the names of the persons who had visited the Shrine that afternoon; surely the investigators would need them; as far as she could see it would be all they would have to go on.

The last name was barely set down in her fine, even calligraphy when the police arrived.

Their leader was an amiable, matter-of-fact young man. His name was Williams, his rank, lieutenant. Miss Wilson told him all that she could; then she led the way to the Memorial Building and returned alone to the Old Stone House.

Soon Poe's imposter left the Shrine in a horizontal position, assisted by two men.

"Lieutenant Williams," Miss Wilson said, when the door had closed on the body of the impersonator, "I have a favor to ask of you. It's not just for me — it's for Richmond — for everyone who admires Poe. This story would be sensational — a man dressed as Poe murdered at the Poe Shrine. It has all kinds of possibilities for exploitation. Can't you just make a report that an unidentified man has been found dead under suspicious circumstances on East Main Street? If you have to give an exact address you can say 1916 East Main Street — I don't think most people would identify that number as the Poe Shrine. That really won't be suppressing news but it would protect one of the country's great literary shrines. If there is any unfavorable publicity it might mean an end to the Shrine. People would come — don't you see? — not from love of Poe but to look at a room in which someone was murdered."

Lieutenant Williams understood. "I think you're right. I'll do what I can. Meantime, thanks for the list of the people who visited the Shrine today. A lot of them seem to be from out of town. They may have just been passing through Richmond. I mustn't waste any time trying to reach them."

"When you've finished with them you must come to see me," Miss Wilson said. "I've nothing to say now that could possibly help, but I may think of something later."

Their earnest, worried expressions were almost identical as they said goodbye and promised to meet again within a few hours.

As Miss Wilson left the Shrine and locked its doors on the remnants of murder she did not examine her emotions. She must get away, that was essential; then she could think. She remembered taking a bus, asking for a transfer, and later she had some slight recollection of waiting to transfer across from the Telephone Building. The bus had traveled to West Grace and Laurel Streets before she decided to get off and visit one of the girls' dormitories of Wellington College; it was not far from her apartment on West Franklin Street and she just might learn something from one of the

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students who had been to the Shrine that afternoon.

The hostess admitted her and Miss Wilson asked if any of the girls who had visited the Shrine were in. She was given the name and room number of a student and directed upstairs.

A qualm overtook her then. This might very well be usurpation of the Police Department's domain. But she must think about the murder and try to analyze it; and to do this she needed facts.

Mary Johnson, the student, was barefooted and wore only a slip.

"Golly," she said, "I'm sorry not to be decent. I thought it was one of the kids. Please excuse me." She grabbed for a robe.

"You may not remember," Miss Wilson said, "but I'm the guide or lecturer — whatever you want to call it — at the Edgar Allan Poe Shrine. I was wondering if anything out of the ordinary happened while you were there this afternoon."

"Gosh, I don't know. I don't *think* so. Except of course I was awfully disappointed about the room where the raven is. Some of the students had said they liked it best of all. It's what I get for waiting till the last minute, I suppose."

Miss Wilson tried not to let her eyes glisten in anticipation; she tried not to wet her lips.

"What do you mean you were disappointed?"

"Well, the door was shut and there was a sign saying 'Temporarily Closed.' I hated to miss it because some of the kids said it was about the spookiest thing they'd ever seen — all those drawings of *The Raven* and the raven itself there on the table."

"You didn't by any chance see anyone who looked like Poe?"

"Golly, no!"

Miss Wilson thanked Mary Johnson and left the dormitory.

She made a determined, thought-free walk to her apartment; she insisted on keeping her mind inactive until she could cook a light supper for herself.

Catarina, named after Poe's cat (Miss Wilson's only surrender to Poe associations in her own household), waited for her at the door. There was only the most formal greeting between them; Catarina disliked being fondled.

Miss Wilson found it hard to refrain from thinking about the murder. It took the strictest discipline to make her mind behave while she prepared an omelet and a salad of lettuce, endive, watercress, and asparagus. She did not usually drink coffee at night — it kept her awake; but tonight she would need to be kept awake. She got out the percolator that she used only when she had guests, filled it, and set it on the stove. Then she ate. Ordinarily she did not leave dirty dishes in the sink; but this was no ordinary occasion. The coffee burbled cheerfully as it rose in the pot; she watched it gain blackness; then she poured a cup. When she had set it on a table beside her favorite chair she drew the drapes and sat down.

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The time had come to think.

Miss Wilson's hand reached for a lamp, but she suppressed her impulse to flood the room with light.

The hour had come to think of Poe and Dupin and of the help they could offer her. Darkness was the atmosphere each of them encouraged; hadn't Dupin himself insisted in *The Purloined Letter:* "If it is any point requiring reflection, we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark"? Then let her, as a willing disciple, follow the master's rule.

She let her mind trot and scamper like a dog that hates the leash. Perhaps she was a silly woman and too full of pride, but as much as anything in life she had wanted Poe to be proud of her. That was an idiotic way to put it — wanting someone dead for more than a hundred years to be proud of you. But he had suffered so deeply at so many hands — possibly, most of all, at his own hands — that she felt very close to him. Poor Poe! All his life he had been protected by women, from the gracious Frances Valentine Allan to the time of his last dreadful agony when Mrs. Moran, the wife of the doctor at the Washington Hospital in Baltimore where he died, had ministered to him. Margaret Ellen Wilson wanted to protect him now.

It was just possible, she thought, that she felt closer to Poe than anyone now alive. Oh, she wasn't in love with him in the way Fanny Kemble had been in love with Byron or Amy Lowell with Keats. But she was the chatelaine of Poe's shrine in Richmond; she was his protectress, and nobody had any business coming on the premises and committing murder, especially committing murder on the person of someone dressed like Poe. The names in the register incensed her — Gus Dupin and Eddie Poe! Levity, no respect. . . . It was outrageous.

Miss Wilson pulled her feelings up. Anger was not an indulgence she could allow herself now. She must stop such foolish meanderings and get on with her thoughts.

Handwriting. She came back to that. Again she recalled that the graphologist had written that she had powers of analysis. Poe's critique and extollment of analysis were in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter.* Analysis was the one quality he had seemed to revere above all others. At times in his life he had even overestimated his ability to analyze, perhaps because he knew he was a person of violent emotions and liked to cherish, even if somewhat falsely, an ability unrelated to passion.

Poe had in fact attempted to solve a real-life crime, fictionized in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,* before the police. Good lord, Miss Wilson asked herself, is that what I am proposing to do, with Poe's help? It was, indeed!

Then start at the beginning, she urged herself. Two men. They had signed themselves Dupin and Poe, and one had ended up dead. Two friends on a lark, but only one had left the Shrine alive.

What did that remind her of?

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Two friends, conversing pleasantly — one tricked into doing something but not aware that he was being tricked.

The Cask of Amontillado, of course. Fortunato and Montresor. Two friends. But one was not a friend. And he had duped the other through vanity, through his palate, his knowledge of wines, into meeting a horrible death.

Fortunato and Montresor. Eddie Poe and Gus Dupin.

If two men came as friends to the Poe Shrine for a lark, a hoax, it must have been carefully planned.

But no man carefully plans his own murder.

Leave the two friends for a minute, she instructed herself. Leave *The Cask of Amontillado*. Just consider the fact of the man's death — the man dead in the room, the raven a few inches from his outstretched hands.

What did that suggest?

But her mind, the dog she had unleashed, would not pick up the scent. It would not sniff. It withdrew. It refused to pursue the quarry.

Very well, then, she thought, don't insist that the mind do what it balks at. Go back to the two friends, the two who signed their names as Poe and Dupin; two friends on a prank; they must have winked at each other as they signed the register, as she waited to conduct them through the Shrine.

But she found herself thinking of Poe's parents instead. They were desperately poor. His mother, after his father's death or desertion . . . heavy with child, returning to the stage as soon as she could get up after the birth of her daughter Rosalie . . . Miss Wilson felt a deep sadness as she recalled Elizabeth Poe's plight. She supposed she should have grown accustomed to the tragedy of everything and everyone related to Poe, but there was never a moment when she could not be saddened by it. Poe, who gave so much to the world and had so little, who was defeated and starving — one of the few authentic starving poets in literary history. . . .

Miss Wilson commanded her brain to stop its melancholy reflections. Get back to the murder, she admonished it sternly.

All she really knew was that two people had entered the Shrine that afternoon and had signed the register as Poe and Dupin.

Wait! Whoever had done the murder must surely have registered in the guest book on a previous occasion. He must have familiarized himself with the setting; he would have to know about the room where *The Raven* illustrations were hung.

Then his name must be in the register twice!

After five telephone calls Miss Wilson located Lieutenant Williams. She told him she was sure she could be of help if he brought the Shrine guest book to her immediately.

When Lieutenant Williams's knock sounded on her door Miss Wilson was sitting in pitch darkness. She blinked

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against the lights as she turned them on to admit him. For an instant Lieutenant Williams seemed illuminated.

He handed her the register.

"Here's the book," he said.

Book. Williams.

He handed her a book and his name was Williams.

She trembled as if a revelation were about to occur. But no revelation came. She invited him in and poured some coffee. He took it eagerly and drank it in three gulps.

He had nothing to report. "No luck. I found a few of the people who visited the Shrine this afternoon still in Richmond. A lot of them were tourists, I guess, who have already left town. None of those I saw could tell me anything we don't know, and we haven't even been able to identify the victim. There's nothing about his his clothes to tell us who he is. He had on a wig, by the way. Actually, he's rather bald. The mustache was false, too. He even wore makeup. Seemed funny for a man to be wearing makeup."

A wig. A mustache. Makeup.

Joy and exultancy possessed Miss Wilson. Poe and Dupin were guiding her accurately. But she must take herself in hand. She must proceed logically.

"Now, Lieutenant Williams, before I begin I want you to know that I respect the police. I don't share Dupin's opinion — well, I'm not sure he felt that way about the police in general, perhaps only the one with whom he was involved at the time. I mean I don't think you're capable — in Dupin's words — oh, well, I suppose it's gentler in French: *de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.*"

"Go right ahead," Lieutenant Williams said. "I'm not following you, but I sure am interested."

"All I'm saying is that you must be doing a good job or you wouldn't be a lieutenant. You're competent and trustworthy. But you see, I feel that I must help solve this crime because — well, because it happened where it did and because the place points rather logically to who did it. Not that I know his name yet or where he is or how you can find him, but I think I'll know soon. Of course, all the hard work will be left to you. But I want you to know what I've been thinking.

"First, though, I want to look at the register. The murderer has been to the Shrine before and fairly recently, I think."

Miss Wilson grappled with the large register, actually an old-style ledger.

"It's the handwriting of the man who registered today as Dupin that I've got to find."

She thumbed through the leaves, stopped, went back to that day's entries, shook her head, started again, consulted more entries; then she stopped again, gazed hard, sighed, and said, "There it is — I'm sure of it. The man you want is named Horace Manchester."

Lieutenant Williams set his cup

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down. He was impressed; in fact, he was astounded, and trying very hard not to be overwhelmed. He said, "Was this Horace Manchester thoughtful enough to write down his address and telephone number?"

"He's given his address as New York City."

"New York is a big place."

"We can narrow it down for you."

"Can we?"

"May I go back for a moment?"

"Anything you say, Miss Wilson."

"I was thinking of the two men as Montresor and Fortunato — the two characters in *The Cask of Amontillado*. I'd like to go ahead and call them that, though we know that our Montresor is Manchester. Curious, isn't it? — The same initial.

"My mind wouldn't go any further when I started to think of Elizabeth Poe. She was an actress. Then when you came and handed me the ledger I felt there was a revelation in the making. But all I did was to ask you in and then I poured the coffee. I know now what my subconscious was reaching for. A book. Handed to me by a man named Williams. And that reminded me of Emlyn Williams and a book. He did readings from Dickens dressed as Dickens. Impersonation. Actor. Don't you see? Somebody dressed like Poe reading *The Raven* in the Poe Shrine. These two men must be actors. Ordinary persons might not know where to buy wigs and mustaches; might not know about makeup. Their minds wouldn't run in theatrical channels.

"Actors. There have been dozens of stock companies in and around Richmond; the summer season is about over and actors are getting back to New York for fall casting. Actors might have come to the Shrine from Washington, Norfolk, Williamsburg, Abingdon, or anywhere around Richmond. But actors must have rehearsals. They're not at all impromptu persons. One of the friends, or both of them, would have had to be at the Shrine before — in fact, Horace Manchester was here in June. Otherwise he wouldn't have known the floor plan. He wouldn't have realized that the room upstairs could be shut off from the rest of the Shrine while the staging was being prepared. It's even possible that Manchester had no plan for staging a murder at Poe's Shrine when he first visited the Shrine.

"So this crime probably involves two actors who played Richmond or somewhere in the vicinity this summer. I'd guess that for our two men the season ended last night. These two actors were leaving the vicinity and heading for New York. One felt deep hatred for the other — I don't know why, but we can assume, if murder was committed, there must have been an intense loathing.

"Maybe the victim, whom I'll continue to call Fortunato because we still don't know his name, had planned to do some readings dressed as Poe — in the way that Emlyn Williams did readings from Dickens. Manchester appeals to his friend's vanity. What a publicity stunt to come to the

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Shrine and read *The Raven* in the very room where the bust of Pallas is, and all the *The Raven* illustrations are hung. How shocked and thrilled the visitors at the Shrine would be. The papers would carry feature stories about it. Engagements and bookings would pour in. All right, Fortunato says. They come to the Shrine and Fortunato brings his makeup. A brief time is needed to dress, but Manchester has thought of everything — he has brought a printed sign saying 'Temporarily Closed,' which he tacks to the outside of the door, so they won't be disturbed. Then when Fortunato has completed his Poe makeup and thinks the door should be opened and he should begin to do his reading of *The Raven*, his friend proves to be not his friend but his murderer. A cord. Strangulation. Manchester escapes. He is now en route to New York — unless he took a plane, in which case he's already there. He is smug and triumphant. But he has forgotten something: *his right name is in the register!* And actors can be located through Actors' Equity. Actors' Equity, did you know, helped place a monument on the unmarked grave of Poe's mother in St. John's Churchyard?

"Now then, Lieutenant Williams, that's the best Poe and Dupin and I can do. Try to locate Horace Manchester through Actors' Equity, and perhaps you can even get some help here from the newspaper critics who followed the summer theatrical season."

On Wednesday afternoon Miss Wilson escorted a small group through the Shrine. It seemed uncannily appropriate that they had suggested detective fiction as a topic for discussion.

She told them in some detail of Poe's contribution: the eccentric, infallible detective; the narrator who is something of a dunderhead and has to have the genius's deductions explained; the ineffectual police.

"So you see," she concluded, "not since Poe's invention of the modern detective story has there been any important addition."

One of the young men called out, "Oh, but you're wrong. What about blondes and sex? They're additions, aren't they?"

Miss Wilson smiled at him. "No," she said. "they aren't additions. They're aberrations."

The sympathetic laughter buoyed her. She had been apprehensive and depressed since Sunday night. She withdrew from the guests and they went their separate ways around the Shrine.

The ringing of the telephone summoned her.

"Is this the Edgar Allan Poe Detective Agency?" someone asked. "I'd like to speak to Operative Wilson, please."

She recognized the voice of Lieutenant Williams.

"Hello," she said. "How are you?"

"Dead on my feet. But as soon as I get a little rest I want you to enroll me in the Beginners' Class in Deduc-

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tion. I've been on the chase you suggested and it didn't turn out to be a wild goose. In fact, Miss Wilson, even if it is the Twentieth Century I think it's just as well that you live in Richmond. If you were in Salem they'd use the old gallows tree on you — they sure would!"

His voice dropped. "We located Horace Manchester — or Montresor, as you and Poe would say. Thanks for what you did. We might never have got him if not for you."

It wasn't I, Miss Wilson thought humbly as she hung up the receiver. It was Edgar A. Poe.

An Invitation to Burglars . . . to Return!

The Inhabitants are desired to be careful of their Doors, Windows, &c. as there are a set of House breakers now in Town. Some of them broke off one of the Shutters, and a Pane of Isaac Heron's Shop Window, on Sunday the 27th ult. so early as 9 o'clock in the Night. The Noise alarmed the Family, and the Villains made off.

Isaac Heron presents his Compliments to those Gentry, and congratulates them on their getting so clean off, on a Night so very dirty and wet. If they choose to return, during the cold Season, he will take care to provide them a warm Reception. And will endeavour to prevail upon them to leave behind ere they go, some Proof of their Identity; such as an amputated Limb, or, even a Snuff box full of Brains. The latter may be of Use to our very vigilant City Watch, though, it is thought they sleep pretty sound with the few they have got.

News item in the New York Journal; *or,* The General Advertiser, *January 7, 1773.*

(Contributed by Rita Gottesman)

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Black Mask Magazine

Now an important section of EQMM

When Captain Joseph T. Shaw died on August 1, 1952, your Editors were asked to write a few words "in memoriam." The tribute appeared in "The Third Degree," published by the Mystery Writers of America. Here is part of what we said: "There was once an editor in the detective field who had a definite purpose and a definite aim. He believed that detective fiction is the most absorbing of all literature . . . However, for detective stories to be convincing, this editor insisted that they must be real in motive, character, and action . . . and they must be written with the keenest thought and greatest skill."

Those words are quoted almost verbatim from an editorial note written by the late Captain Shaw while he was still editor of Black Mask. It represents "Cap" Shaw's credo for detective-story writing, and it explains why that fine old gentleman was the most influential editorial force in the origin and development of the hardboiled school. "Cap" Shaw's concept is as sound today as it was when he first expounded it. And it is precisely that concept of the tough, American 'tec that we still adhere to in the Black Mask section of EQMM . . . No sex and sadism merely for the sake of sensationalism. Instead, we give you the finest of action-suspense stories — for under the toughness you will find human hearts and human emotions, and under the American manner, that precious ingredient, universal appeal.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

TITLE: ***The Most Exciting Show in Town***

TYPE: Detective Story à la **Black Mask**

DETECTIVE: Bill Merrill

LOCALE: Cortelyou Theatre, a neighborhood movie in the United States

COMMENTS: *Ace detective Merrill was dead tired but he took his best girl to see a double feature. It turned out to be a slambang triple feature — at least!*

MERRILL STIRRED UNCOMFORTably at the prolonged kiss taking place on the screen. "Break!" he muttered unromantically. "Come up for air!" He fanned himself mockingly with his hat. He took out his watch. "Two solid minutes they been at it," he remarked.

"Sh, Bill!" His fair companion gave him a stab of the eyes and a sharp dig of the elbow. "Let somebody else enjoy it, even if you can't! You don't have to look if it hurts that bad. Close your eyes till it's over."

He promptly carried out the suggestion, effacing the two gigantic heads still pressed tightly together on the movie screen. "I don't hafta come here to sleep. I can sleep at home, free of charge," he mumbled rebelliously.

"It's a double feature," she reminded him tartly. "Maybe the second one'll be better."

He sighed. "It couldn't be worse." He gave a cavernous yawn, genuine this time and not pretended. He sank a little lower in his seat, eyes still closed. His face relaxed. Soon a burbling sound like coffee in a percolator came from him. His head slipped sideways by notches, until it came to rest on the girl's slim shoulder. Somebody in the row behind snickered.

Her attitude, now that he was no longer a witness to it, was entirely different from what might have been expected. A smile dimpled her pretty cheeks. She sloped her shoulder to make him more comfortable, reached around and gave the other side of his head a little pat. "Poor kid," she said to herself. "He's too dead for sleep!"

Copyright, 1936, by Cornell Woolrich; originally titled, "Double Feature"

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Betty Weaver was a good sport; you have to be when you're an ace detective's best girl.

The nip of a hefty heel coming down on one of his pet toes jolted Merrill awake with a grunt. There was a man trying to worm his way past him to the vacant seat on the other side of Betty. The usher with the flashlight hadn't been much help showing him where to step and where not to. Merrill jerked his foot back and screwed up his face.

"I'm sorry," said the man softly, and edged through with his back to them. Merrill doubled his leg up in front of him and held onto his throbbing toe. He put it back on the floor again, and leaned out across Betty to give the man a dirty look. The latter's eyes weren't used to the dark yet; he didn't seem to notice Merrill's look, but sat squinting straight ahead at the screen. He'd kept his coat on, with the collar up in back, although the way the place was jammed, it was pretty stuffy.

Merrill sat back again, his indignation evaporating. The long kiss had finally faded out and they were showing trailers now. He shifted his attention to the program, determined to get his money's worth of show even if it was next week's.

A lion showed up, burped at the audience, and the newsreel came on. Merrill liked newsreels. Betty evidently didn't. She took out her mirror and began to inspect her face by the fairly strong gleam coming from the screen. It was a snow scene, skiers on a mountain, flashing down runways that were steep and dazzling white.

It changed abruptly to a group of prison officials, posing with a convict in their midst, seemingly in the greatest of friendliness. The picture was a "still," snapped by a newspaper photographer nearly two years before, incorporated now in the newsreel because of its timeliness. That convict standing beside the warden had escaped, had made a name for himself by his later exploits that topped Jesse James', and was now the object of the biggest manhunt in the history of the country. Nobody in the theater needed the voice of the announcer to tell them who the fugitive was, but he did anyway. A sort of shudder passed through the audience at the sound of the name; it had become a household word all over America.

"Take a good look at this man, ladies and gentlemen," the sound track pattered. "You've been hearing a lot about him lately, and you don't need to be told who he is. Squint Harman — and they're still out looking for him!"

"Harman," sounded in suppressed whispers from all parts of the house, "Harman — see him?" The audience rustled like a flock of uneasy doves.

Merrill became cold and tense all at once, every nerve taut as piano wiring. The hand that suddenly gripped the wrist with which Betty was replacing her mirror in her handbag was like an iron clamp. She gave a nervous start, but had presence of mind enough not to cry out. He was beckoning for

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the glass with his other hand, but keeping it close to his body. The little quicksilvered oblong passed between them unobtrusively. She still didn't know what it was all about, glanced at him inquiringly, but remained still as a mouse.

"Keep looking straight ahead," he breathed out of the corner of his mouth. "Sit back a little in your seat." She closed the gap between her shoulders and the back of the seat, so he knew she'd heard him.

He palmed the small glass with his right hand, the hand that dangled out over the aisle; then he brought it up sidewise, to the level of his face, and turned his eyes toward it. He was looking out toward the aisle. The glass was turned inward toward the row of seats. Betty's little nose intruded on the edge for a second, then almost instinctively her head retreated still farther back, out of the way.

The profile of the man next to her now had the glass to itself.

He was still squinting, and he'd been in ten minutes now, so the squint was habitual and not because of the darkness of the theater. It gave his face a slight Mongolian cast.

Merrill shifted his eyes to the screen for purposes of comparison, then back to the mirror again. One was full-face, the other profile, and so identification couldn't be established instantly, not even by a trained eye like Merrill's. But the eyes, the squinting, slitted, malicious eyes, were the connecting link. They were a perfect match to those on the screen. That was Harman sitting two seats away, staring with perfect composure at his own picture! In fact, he was even enjoying himself a little, to judge by the curl of his upper lip.

Just as the "still" on the screen dissolved, but while it was still imprinted on his retinas, Merrill seemed to feel the man's indirect gaze on him via the mirror, because he turned inquiringly that way for an unguarded moment and presented himself full-face. Nose, mouth, chin, cheekbones, width of brows, and facial oval all clicked simultaneously, reproducing what had just been on the screen — like a positive matching a negative. So, in spite of the stories going around, he hadn't gone in for facial surgery.

He must have seen the mirror. Merrill just had time to grimace hideously and pretend to be digging between his teeth for a morsel of food. It was a bad slip, and a question of who had beaten the other to it: Harman's glance or Merrill's pantomime. The killer turned his head incuriously front again, so that seemed to answer it. He stirred a little in his seat, the better to enjoy a row of half-clad bathing girls parading up and down a Florida beach.

Merrill could hear Betty breathing a little faster, as though she knew something was up but couldn't figure out what it was. He saw her shut her eyes for a moment, then open them again.

He slipped the mirror back to her under her arm, and her handbag swallowed it. Then he plucked at her

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sleeve and jerked his thumb at the aisle. The first step was to get her to the back of the theater. The guy was probably loaded down with equalizers, while he himself didn't have a thing on him — which was what you got for thinking you were ever really off duty, day or night.

He had no idea of jumping on him where he sat. There'd be pandemonium in the middle of all these people, and the theater was full of unguarded exits. The thing to do was to phone in, have the place surrounded, and pick him up as he came out. Merrill planned to come back and sit down again, so he could keep his eye on the guy until the payoff.

Betty sat staring straight ahead with a face like marble. Merrill wondered what was the matter with her — she was usually very quick on the pick-up. He tugged at her again and thumbed the aisle. Her eyes flicked toward him but she didn't turn her head. He couldn't hear her breathing any more. She sat deathly still.

They had, fortunately, come in ahead of the desperado, so he had no way of knowing how long they had been there. Merrill found her small foot with his, prodded it, then said audibly: "This is where we came in, isn't it?"

All she did was shake her head, but without looking at him.

He had to get word out without another minute's delay; the show wouldn't break for another 40 minutes or so, but that couldn't be taken into consideration in this case. Harman just wasn't an ordinary movie patron, staying to the end. He might get restive any minute. Something might arouse his suspicions. He might leave before a cordon had been thrown around the building.

"I'm dying for a smoke," Merrill said. "I'm going back and grab one — be right with you again." Now he'd have to clear her out after he'd lit the fuse.

She sat there like a statue, rigid, without answering. But suddenly, as he braced his legs under him to get up, she clawed at his coat sleeve with her hand. She twisted the cloth, caught up all the slack there was, until the sleeve was almost as tight as a tourniquet. It was as though she wanted desperately to tell him something, without being able to.

He tensed at that. A momentary sense of immediate danger swept over him. But when he thrust his head slightly back across her shoulders, Harman seemed lost to the world, devouring the screen with vacant, moronic enjoyment.

"Bill —". She spoke in a furred voice, kneading his sleeve frantically, but stopped abruptly. He could hear her give a sudden intake of breath. She didn't go ahead. He waited. When it came, the rest of it, it was flat, toneless. "I'm thirsty. Bring me a drink of water from the cooler when you come back —"

It was just the way anybody would ask for a drink of water, casually, offhand. But that "Bill —" and that stranglehold on his coat sleeve didn't

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match the rest of it; it was as though the request had been improvised, to cover up what she had originally started to say. When he glanced at her, she kept staring at the screen, wouldn't look at him.

He got up and left the seat without another word, made his way soundlessly up the thick-carpeted aisle, not walking too fast lest the man in the seat next to her turn around and look after him. He turned and looked back at the two of them from the head of the aisle. Their heads were side by side, amidst all the other heads. Everything was still under control. Harman had made no move following his own departure, seemed not to have even noticed it. Merrill would have to get back there quick, though, and get her out of the way. He cursed the sudden stubborn streak that had cropped out in her just now; she'd hear plenty from him when this was over! She ought to know by now that he knew just what he was doing!

The moderate up-grade walk changed to a quick lope as he crossed the inner foyer behind the orchestra pit, buttonholed the usher on duty. "The telephones — where are they?"

"Downstairs in the smoking lounge."

A small electric sign pointed the way through the gloom. He streaked down the stair-well to sub-basement-level, came out into a room crammed with modernistic furniture — somebody's idea of luxury. A young woman was sitting there, as if waiting for someone.

There was only one phone, but the fact that it was already in use didn't deter him for a minute. He sandwiched in between a woman phoning and the wall, said something about police business, took the receiver away from her, and cut off the call by sinking the hook. Then he snapped the glass door shut.

"I'm at the Cortelyou Theatre, on the North Side," he told headquarters, "and Squint Harman is here in the audience. Am I sure?" he echoed caustically. "I'm sitting two seats away from him, and he lounged all over my dogs getting in! Of course, if you want me to ask him, I'll hear what he has to say!"

"Don't get wise," he was told dryly. "No one said they're not taking your word for it. Now get this, Merrill."

"Yes, sir."

"We'll have a dragnet thrown around the whole block in less than five minutes. In the meantime, these are your instructions and see that you follow them: keep your eye on him, but don't give yourself away — not even if he gets up to leave before we've closed in. Just tail him if he does. Don't try to take him single-handed, you understand? We'll only lose him again, and the whole damn thing'll start over —"

"I'm not in a fix to dispute that with you," Merrill said, coloring. "I'm here unheeled."

A low whistle sounded at the other end. Then the voice became impersonal again. "We'll get him when he comes out. If he stays till the end, do

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what you can to protect the audience. Now get back there and don't lose sight of him for a minute. You can consider yourself personally responsible if there's a slip-up!"

"I'm right on his neck!" Merrill broke the connection, came out to find one woman yanking the other toward the stairs. She had evidently been eavesdropping. "Harman's in the audience! Hurry up!"

Merrill beat them to the foot of the stairs and blocked their way.

"No you don't! Go up there and start a riot, would you? You're staying here until it's over. You know too much, both of you!" He motioned toward a door. "G'wan, get in there — nothing'll happen to you!"

He pushed them through the door and closed it on them. He knew they'd slip out again the minute the coast was clear, but he slid one of the bulky modernistic divans in front of the door to block it from the outside and hold them as long as possible. He rocketed up to the top of the stairs, flagged the usher, palmed his badge.

"You go down there, son, and sit on that divan you'll see in front of the ladies' door. Don't let anybody out until I tell you to," he whispered. "I'm holding a couple of dames in there. Don't listen to what they'll try to tell you — they're dips, pickpockets. You're my deputy — I'll square it with the manager for you!"

The boy gave him a thrilled look, then disappeared below.

Merrill filled a paper cup at one of the fountains, took out a pencil stub and scrawled on the outside of it: "Get the hell out of here and home — explain later," with an annoyed scowl.

He started down the aisle none too slowly, splashing a little water as he went. Instantly, even before he came abreast of the row he had left them in, he knew something was wrong. There was a double gap in the ranks of heads — two were missing. And the vacant aisle seat that had been his own told him which two it was.

He squeezed the paper cup flat. Water spurted out, and he ran the rest of the way to the empty seats.

Her coat was still draped across the back of the seat she'd been in. Like a mute distress signal. There was no sign that Harman had ever sat there beside her. His seat was folded up.

Merrill nearly threw himself on top of the spectacled matron occupying the fourth seat in from the aisle, shaking her by the shoulder. "The two people next to you — how long ago did they get up together?"

"Just now," she said. "Just before you got here. They'll be back. She left her coat —"

He knew better. He knew they wouldn't. He knew a lot of things all at once — and too late. Why she'd sat there so rigid, refusing to budge, afraid to turn and look at him. Harman had caught onto the mirror stunt and must have been sitting there with his gun digging into her from that moment on.

He knew what that despairing clutch at his sleeve meant now, and that quickly stifled "Bill —" that had

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ended so lamely in a request for a drink of water. And he, like a fool, had thought he was putting one over on the slit-eyed menace beside her. Now Harman had taken her with him as a hostage, was using her as a living safe-conduct to see him out of the theater.

He fled up the aisle to the rear of the house again, like someone pursued by devils. One usher he'd sent downstairs, but there was another one on duty inside the main door. Merrill grabbed at him like a drowning man at a straw. "A man and a girl — man with sleepy eyes and a gray coat turned up in back — did they go out this way? Have you seen them?"

"Yeah, just couple minutes ago."

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, and cracked open one of the opaque swinging doors that gave onto the outer lobby. In the instant it swayed open, he had a bird's-eye view of the vestibule and the street beyond. The light had gone out in the ticket seller's booth and her blonde head was missing, yet it was not empty. He saw a form silhouetted through it against the marquee lights beyond. And on each side of the entrance, where there were tinseled boards advertising coming attractions, two idle individuals stood killing time, as if reading the display copy over and over. He recognized both of them. The cordon surrounding the place had already been formed.

The usher was saying behind him, "But they didn't go out. They came as far as here and I opened the door for them, then they changed their minds and went upstairs to the balcony —"

So the cordon had just beaten him to it. But he'd seen them before they saw him, and had doubled back in again — with her! Merrill didn't feel any relief at the knowledge that he was still in the theater with her. Quite the opposite. She was almost certainly a goner, now that the man was trapped!

"I think she'd been taken sick," the usher was babbling unasked. "She looked pretty white, and she kept sort of leaning against him wherever they went. I tried to ask her if she wanted a doctor, but they'd gone upstairs —"

Merrill wasn't listening. "The roof — he can get up there from the balcony, can't he? There must be some way up!"

He gave a short, low whistle through the crack of the door, and one of the rubbernecks down by the display boards was suddenly next to him, as though he moved on invisible wires.

"He's hep," Merrill breathed through the slit. "The roof — tell them to throw men into the adjoining buildings quick and head him off. The roof is only two stories high and he can get out that way! I think that's where he's heading for —" And then a sort of choked cry broke from him against his will. "And if they see somebody with him up there in the dark, tell them — it's my girl . . ." Instantly he pulled himself together again. "Lend me a gun, will you? I'm going after him inside!"

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It was still warm from the other's body. He pocketed it and went running up the branch of the stairs the usher had pointed to before.

Above, the stairs deployed onto a mezzanine gallery, a long narrow space between the back of the theater and the sloping balcony seats, but walled off from the latter. Two arched openings, one at each end, led to the seats, and in the middle, set high up near the ceiling, was the squat, ponderous metal door guarding the projecting room, with just an ordinary, vertical iron ladder reaching to it.

The balcony usher who had been stealing a look at the picture as closing time neared, came running at the vicious swing of Merrill's arm. "Two people just come up here from below, man and a woman?"

"No, nobody's shown up here. They wouldn't this late any more —"

"Then you missed 'em!" Merrill barked. "Show me how to get up to the roof!'

"Patrons aren't allowed —"

"Show, or I'll hang one on you!" He stiff-armed him for a head-start, and the brass-buttoned employee went stumbling toward a panel stenciled *No Admittance*, just within one of the lateral passageways leading toward the seats. It worked neither on hinges nor a knob, but on a vertical bolt running from top to bottom the entire length of it. Merrill hitched this up and shoved, but the way the thing resisted and its metallic snarling were pretty conclusive evidence it hadn't been opened recently.

"I'm going up and take a look anyway," he instructed. "Stay here and hold it open for me so I can get back in again!"

A short, steep flight of iron stairs led to a duplicate of the first hatchway, and there was a decrepit bulb lighting the space between the two. He took the precaution of giving the bulb a couple of turns to the left; it expired and made him less of a target from the roof outside when he'd forced open the second door.

It was just as well he had. The squeaking and grating of the second door boomed out all over the roof, with the tall surrounding buildings helping it along acoustically. Instantly a handful of angry bees, steel jacketed, seemed to swarm at it as he swung it cautiously out, and they clicked and popped in a half dozen places at once. But the flashes of yellow and the bangs that accompanied them did not come from the roof itself but from the various windows overlooking it. The reception committee was greeting the wrong guy, that was all.

"That would've been one for the record, if —" he thought grimly. Still, it wouldn't have been their fault any more than his. He'd flattened himself on the steps like a caterpillar, chin resting on the top one, while he held the door open a crack with one hand. Threadlike as the slit was, something whistled and plopped into the plaster *behind* him instead of hitting the side of the door. "That's Ober, showing off how good he is!" he scowled resentfully. "He oughta

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be in a sideshow with those eyes of his!"

The thought of what would have happened if it had been Harman, with Betty in front of him, wasn't a pretty one. But it was a cinch Harman hadn't come up here, or if he had, had doubled back again in a hurry. Otherwise he'd be lying stretched out on the roof right now, and they wouldn't be wasting time trying to riddle him.

He was reaching behind him with his free hand, trying to get his handkerchief out of his back pocket and flap it at them in some way, when a voice boomed out: "Hold it, men, for God's sake! He's got a girl with him —" They'd just sent word up, and that would have been a big consolation to Betty, turned into a human lead pencil.

Merrill straightened up, gave the door a kick outward with his foot, and bellowed forth: "It's Merrill, you bunch of clodhoppers! Why don't you use a little self-control!" A figure poised on one of the window sills and jumped down to the theater roof; but Merrill had already turned and gone skittering down the stairs again, to where the usher was calling up to him: "Hey, you! Quick, you up there —"

He missed the last few steps entirely, but there was no room to fall in — just landed smotheringly on the uniformed figure below him. The show must have ended in those few minutes while he was up on the roof. The blaze of light coming through from the auditorium inside told him that, and the peaceful humming and shuffling from belowstairs as the audience filed out and dispersed, all unaware of what had been going on in their midst. It was just a neighborhood movie house, it hadn't been a big crowd, and the balcony was already empty and still. But the usher, as they both picked themselves up, was pointing a trembling hand out into the gallery.

Merrill took in three things at once: the motion picture operator lying flat on his back groaning, as though he'd just been thrown down bodily out of the projection room; the projection room door above, momentarily open and blazing with incandescence to reveal Harman's head and shoulders; and the iron ladder swinging out from the wall as it toppled and fell, pushed down by Harman.

Merrill had the bead on him already, and it wouldn't have taken a dead shot like Ober to plug him with all that blaze of light behind him, but Betty's head showed just behind him and her scream came winging down. Merrill's finger joint swayed despairingly, and the slamming tight of the door cut short her scream, effacing the single opportunity that had been given him.

He just stood there staring sickly upward at where the opening had been, as the full implication hit him. They had him now, sure — trapped, cornered; but he had them too! He had Merrill, anyway. And that was just the trouble; Merrill was under orders, he wasn't alone in this.

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The audience safely out of the way, his fellows came pouring up the stairs from below, and another group came clattering down from the roof. The cordon had tightened into a knot gathered there under the projection room door. Merrill, very white and still, just pointed to it without a word.

The captain took the situation in at a glance. "Okay, it's all over now but the shouting," he nodded grimly. "But it's going to be pretty messy." He began spitting orders right and left. "Close up all those side exits. Bring up the gas bombs. Spread yourselves out. He's liable to pop out again and take half of you with him."

The whole place started to swim in front of Merrill's eyes. He saw them pick up the operator, announce he had a broken collar-bone, and carry him downstairs. He saw them bring up two tommyguns, set one up on each arm of the stairs at floor level, tilted to command the projection room door from each side of the mezzanine.

The captain said: "Lug that acetylene torch up on the roof. Cut a hole down on top of him. Take the manager with you — he'll be able to locate the right spot for you."

A livid little man was hustled toward the companionway Merrill had climbed earlier, protesting: "What'll the owners say when they hear?"

"You, Ober, you're supposed to be good," was the next command. "Go down on the main floor and when I give the word have yourself a pot-shot at the camera sights or whatever other openings there are in front. We might be able to let a little ventilation into him from that side. And now you two with the tommies, have a try at this door from where you are. Let's see if it's bullet proof or not. Back, everyone —"

It was the man whose gun Merrill had borrowed who stepped up and said, "He's got Bill's girl in there with him. For God's sake, Cap, you're not gonna —"

The captain whirled on Merrill furiously. "What's the matter with you anyway? Why didn't you speak up? Is that what you been standing there looking so scared about?"

Merrill's knees were about ready to buckle under him; he ran his hand through his hair a couple of times as though he couldn't think straight any more. "We were gonna be married next month," he said wildly. "I thought I was only bringing her to a movie —" His voice died away forlornly.

There was a sudden silence. None of the men moved. The orders hung fire. Then abruptly a bell jangled somewhere nearby. A second time, then a third.

"What's that?" said the captain, looking all around him.

The manager came forward frightenedly. "That's him! That's the projection room trying to get me in my office, on the house phone! Three rings — he must have read the signal on the wall in there! He must want to tell you some —"

"All right, get in there and show us how it works!" The captain gave

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him a push behind the shoulder. He and Merrill and one of the others followed him into his private sanctum and stood watching while he unhooked a hand set and pressed a button on the edge of his desk. He held the phone out toward the captain as though afraid it would bite him. "Here — you — you better talk to him!"

The captain snatched the instrument away from him. They all stood waiting tensely. "Can you hear me in there?" he snapped.

His jaw set at the answer. He muffled the thing against the desk top with a bang. "Safe conduct or he'll bump the girl," he repeated for their benefit.

Merrill looked haggard. His breath sang in his chest like a windstorm. The captain stole a sidewise look at him. "All right," he muttered to the other man, "he wins. We'll get him the minute he lets go of her outside."

But the three of them shared a single unspoken thought: "He won't let go of her — alive."

The captain lifted the phone again. He was stony-faced, and couldn't bring himself to speak for a minute. Finally he swallowed hard, gritted out: "So you want a safe conduct, Harman!"

The answering voice was audible but indistinguishable — like a file rasping against metal.

The captain's face was red with humiliation; he turned his back on the three standing listening. "I see — as far as the storm canopy over the sidewalk out front," he said in a trembling voice. "And I'm to call my men off —"

"This is hard to take," muttered the detective standing beside Merrill.

"And how do we know you'll keep your word?" the captain said.

"He won't, and we all know he won't!" Merrill groaned. "He'll drag her off with him some place and shoot her down the minute he gets in the clear! We're bargaining over a corpse; she's been dead from the minute I left her alone in that seat next to him!"

The captain muttered, scarcely above a choked whisper, "Okay, Harman, you win this round — we're pulling in our horns." He threw down the instrument and slumped into a chair for a moment, shading his eyes with one hand. "This is my finish," he breathed. "I'll be broken for this!" And then his voice rose to a roar. "But what else could I do? Answer that, will you? What else could *anyone* do?"

He stood up again, pounded his fist on the desk. "There's still one chance we got of outsmarting him in the long run! He ain't letting go of her out there. He'll get her out in front, and he'll flag a cab and yank her in it with him — that's his only way of making a clean getaway, of shaking us off. That's what we gotta figure on, anyway; he's a rat, and you don't bank on a rat's promises. All right, Merrill, this'll be your job! You get out there now ahead of him, rake up a cab, and be waiting down the street in it — in the driver's seat.

"Watch your timing at that wheel.

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If you can be coasting along slow when he comes out, instead of standing still waiting, it'll look that much better. Don't try nothing on your own, now — Those are orders! Now hop to it!"

He turned and marched out, gave crsip orders to the men outside, his face expressionless. "Call them down off the roof with that blow torch. Get down to the main floor with those tommies. Clear the mezzanine! Everybody down to the orchestra floor. Line up down there by the stairs. Put your guns away and don't anybody raise a hand. There's a girl's life at stake!" He called in to the manager behind him, "Put the house lights on, every last one of 'em. We don't want any shadows hanging around to bungle things up for us."

The manager scurried across to a control box and frantically pulled switches right and left. The theater blazed.

Merrill had vanished.

The faces that met the captain's and turned away to carry out the incredible orders, were pictures of amazement, stifled by discipline. Not a word was said. The bitterness of the pill the captain was swallowing was only too evident on the "old man's" countenance.

"Must be some kind of a come-on, to get him out of there," one of the policemen breathed, backing a machinegun downstairs.

"Naw, it's the girl."

"But she's a goner anyway! He'll only do it on the street afterwards —"

They all knew it instinctively, even the "old man" himself. But she had to have her chance. She was a girl, and she was Bill's girl. The almost certainty of her death mustn't be turned into a dead certainty, not while there was the slightest means within their power of pulling her through.

The captain was the last one down the stairs. "All right, fall in there, along these stairs. Face the lobby out front. Fold your arms behind you."

They stiffened. A look of resentment that grew to burning hate swept across their faces, but they held their tongues. The blazing lights all around them turned the thing into a parody of the line-up, with themselves in the part of the suspects. They were swearing softly, some of them, under their breaths, a sort of hissing sound like steam escaping from a valve.

"Where's Merrill?" someone asked his neighbor out of the corner of his mouth.

"Probably gone off somewhere to bump himself off!" was the bitter answer.

The captain turned to face the way they were. "Attention," he said almost inaudibly. Then he raised his voice and called to the manager up above: "All right, go back in there and ring him — tell him he's in the clear!" Then he just stood there beside his men, like a very old man, chin down, shoulders bowed, waiting.

The inner doors to the lobby had been folded back, giving an unobstructed view all the way to the silent,

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deserted street out front. At the far end, like a marker beyond which the safe-conduct expired, stood the tenantless ticket booth, door thrown open to show it was empty and a light burning inside. Beyond was a ribbon of yellow sidewalk under the marquee lights, and the darkness of the street, with a car skirting by once in a while, never dreaming what was going on inside.

A breathless silence engulfed the whole place from top to bottom after the captain's last order. They could hear the manager slam down some window that had been left open in his office. Then the faraway triple buzz of his signal sounded in the nearly soundproof projection room. His voice came down to them clearly, through his open office door. "You're in the clear, they're all down below!" Then the office door banged as he locked himself in, out of harm's way.

There wasn't another sound throughout the house for maybe five minutes.

The pall of silence lay heavier and heavier upon the waiting, listening men, until their nerves were ready to snap with the increasing tension. Every eye was on the stairs that came down from the mezzanine.

Suddenly a heavy door grated open somewhere out of sight, up above them, and they tensed. Harman was reconnoitering. Then there was an impact, as though somebody had jumped, immediately followed by a second, lighter one. Then nothing more, while seconds that were like hours ticked themselves off into eternity, and the tension had become almost unbearable. One or two faces showed gleaming threads of sweat coursing down them.

Then, like a flash, something appeared on the topmost step, just under where the ceiling cut the staircase off from view. They all saw it at once, and they all stiffened in unison. A woman's foot, in a patent leather pump, had come down slowly onto the step, as though it were feeling its way.

That was all for a minute. Then its mate came down on the step below it. Then the first one moved past it, down to the third step. And behind them both, as the perspective lengthened following each move they made as closely as in a lock-step, came a man's two feet. The sinister quadruple extremities advanced like some horrible paralytic thing descending a staircase, slowly lengthening.

The heads only came in view when they were near the bottom. He had his right arm around the girl, holding her clamped to him from behind. Her head leaned back against his shoulder, as though she were incapable of standing upright any longer.

She didn't look out at them; it was he who did, and nodded grimly. His free arm, dangling in a straight line from his shoulder, ended in a wink of burnished metal — another gun, for surely there was one already pressed menacingly close to her sagging body.

They came down off the stairs and

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for a moment presented a perfect double target, broadside to the death-like row of policemen ranged across the width of the orchestra. The captain held the men in leash with a single glance of his dilated eyes, and not one stirred. "Steady!" he breathed. "For God's sake, steady!"

Slowly the double target telescoped itself into a single one — the girl — as Harman turned the two of them to face his enemies, then began to back up a step at a time through the long mirrored lobby toward the street.

His voice suddenly shattered the stillness. "I hope you raked 'em all in from out there — for her sake! If I get it in the back, she goes with me!"

"I've kept my word, Harman!" the captain shouted back. "See that you keep yours. That ticket booth's the deadline!"

"Back!" snarled Harman suddenly. "Ba-ack!" The line of men had begun to inch forward, trying to keep the distance between from widening too hopelessly as Harman retreated through the long funnel of the lobby.

He came abreast of the ticket booth, veered off to one side of it after a single flick of his eyes had shown him it was harmless. He moved a step beyond it, a second step, then was out on the open sidewalk under the marquee. He gave a swift glance up one way, down the other.

"Turn that girl loose — you're in the clear now!" the captain roared out to him.

He had reached the edge of the curb with her. His arm went up, signalling off to one side, and a faint droning sounded, coming nearer.

"Merrill!" the captain breathed fervently. "Don't spoil it, now, boys — there's still a chance of saving that girl. Hold it, hold it!"

The oncoming hum suddenly burst into a sleek, yellow cab body, braking to a halt directly behind Harman and the girl, so close it almost seemed to graze him. "Open the door!" they heard him growl, without taking his eyes off them.

A gasp went up from them as they watched.

In the full glare of the lights overhead, the grinning bronzed face of a Negro flashed around as the driver turned to carry out the order. The cab door swung free. Harman had already found the running board with the back of one foot. "D'ye want her?" he snarled back. "Then here she is — come and get her!"

The sudden widening of the space between their two bodies as he stepped back to avoid his own bullet, without dropping the encircling arm, showed his intent — murder.

A figure suddenly dropped from above, like something loosened from the rim of the marquee, and flattened Harman with a swiftness impossible for the eye to follow, even in that bright glare. It was Merrill's hurtling body, rounded into a ball.

There was a flash in front of the girl, but *out* from her as the impact jerked Harman's curved arm straight. A sprinkling of glass trickled from the canopy overhead.

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She went down in the struggle and a moment later emerged unharmed from the squirming tarantula that had formed on the sidewalk, crawling away on her hands and knees toward the sanctuary of the ticket booth. The cab driver, frightened, sped onward with his empty machine.

What remained as she drew away had two heads, four arms, four legs, all mixed inextricably together, threshing around, tearing itself to pieces. Metal glinted from it, and one head reared above the other. Only a lunatic would have risked a shot at such a target from the inner foyer of the theater. Yet a shot roared from inside, and the upper head dropped flat. For a moment the whole thing lay still, as the line of police broke and came rushing out toward it.

Ober came out last, blowing smoke out of his gun.

Merrill slurred Harman's body off his gun, and stood up shakily. The desperado lay squinting up at the marquee overhead, a dark trickle threading out of one ear.

The captain was almost incoherent with rage. He shook his fist in Merrill's face. "I oughta demote you for insubordination! What the devil do you mean by deliberately disobeying my orders? I told you to commandeer a cab and tail him, not pull off a flying trapeze act out here on the sidewalk!"

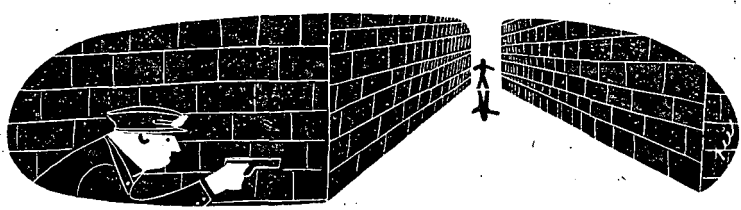
It was mostly relief — blowing off steam after the terrible suspense.

"We got him, didn't we?" Merrill blazed. "It was a cockeyed idea, getting a cab. He could've pinged me from the back the minute he got suspicious and then where'd —" He stopped. Betty was squeezing his arm warningly. He caught on what the squeeze meant: we'll be needing your salary after next month, so shut up.

He did. And he looked up at the marquee while the captain went ahead getting things off his chest as they all stood around and listened. The marquee said up there in fiery letters:

Double Feature
The Most Exciting Show in Town

"Yeah," Merrill thought grimly, "and that was no lie, either."



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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

and another original for our* Black Mask *department

Paul Fairman was born in Missouri some 40 years ago. As he looks back to his young manhood, he remembers that he failed to be graduated from high school because he had flunked English. So he went to work, and he worked and lived in ten different states, and he held all manner of jobs. And then Raymond Chandler's THE BIG SLEEP *was published and Paul Fairman read the book, and it seemed to him that "writing was the easiest thing in the world" — anyway, that Chandler made it look that way. And so Paul Fairman found himself, found his real job: he knew now what he wanted to be — a writer. And he worked at that, really worked at it — only to discover that writing wasn't easy at all, that if anything it was perhaps the hardest thing in the world, that it was only the talented, experienced, sometimes dedicated writers who made it look easy. And by the time Paul Fairman made this discovery, he was ruined for any other work, especially any work that demanded regular hours. So he kept on writing . . .*

And now he's beginning to master his craft. There was that banner month in 1954 when he finished two short stories, and one was bought by the "Saturday Evening Post" and the other by EQMM. The EQMM story is about "a man with a messy handful of debts to society, trotting around town demanding payment" — in other words, a conscientious, hard-working detective. You will find the story tough-fibred in a realistic way — a mixture, as in life, of hardness and sympathy, of emotion and restraint . . . Detective Phalen had learned that you've got to treat people like a row of numbers; but Detective Martin Kyle, who was younger, wondered: Am I a cop or an accountant?

TURTLE RACE

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN

THEY GOT OUT OF THE CAR AND Phalen looked at the house and said, "Eight thousand dollars — maybe ten. They threw these crackerboxes up by the hundreds after the war. Still doing it. Jerry-built jobs, most of them."

It was on Trent Avenue — third

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from the corner in a block of many similar houses. Not the best section of town nor the worst; a few patches of lawn to break the monotony; half a dozen lean poplars trying to brighten things up a little.

"Think I'd better go around the back?" Marty asked.

Phalen threw away the toothpick he'd been chewing. "I don't think it'll be necessary."

Marty rang the bell and they waited a while and then a man opened the door narrowly and Phalen said, "Are you John Benton?"

"Yeah — yeah, that's me. Why?"

The witness had struck it pretty close, Marty thought. Dark complexion; brown curly hair; around five feet ten. He had missed on the weight, though. Benton was much heavier than 150; closer to 180.

"This is Detective Martin Kyle. I'm Detective Sergeant Phalen. Mind if we come in?"

"No — no, I guess I don't mind." Benton stared dully for a moment. Then he jerked the door open as though suddenly remembering that they couldn't walk through it.

They went single-file into the living room and Marty remembered Phalen's word — crackerbox. Neat, though. The rug was visibly worn, but the furniture had been well cared-for. It would outlast the installments.

Benton turned blankly and asked, "What did you fellows want to see me about?" But Phalen didn't answer because, just then, a woman entered the room.

Marty got the odd impression that her eyes came in first, followed by a head and a body; great, dark eyes that didn't fit into a cheap room in a cheap house on a cheap street; eyes that could cast a spell. Then Marty saw the quiet, oval face, the frosty goldenrod hair pulled tightly back into a bun and no nonsense; the little-girl legs under the slight body. He saw the whole woman and he was vaguely disappointed because she somehow did not live up to the promise of the eyes.

Benton motioned with his head, almost defensively. "This is my wife — Ruth." He looked at her and said, "They're policemen."

She walked to his side and laid a hand on his arm. Her eyes moved from his face to that of Phalen, skidded swiftly over Marty, and went back to where they had started. "What do they want?"

Phalen had taken a handful of notes from his pocket and was shuffling through them. He said, "Mr. Benton, are you acquainted with a man named Barney Welch?"

Benton flashed a nervous look at his wife. He said, "Yeah — yeah, I know him." The answer, Marty felt, was for her rather than Phalen.

Marty said, "This Welch we're talking about ran a loan business from his apartment at 812 Beech Street."

"Sure, that's the one."

"Did you make a visit there this afternoon?"

"This afternoon?"

"Today — any time today."

"I stopped in after work."

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The admission was guilt-charged. More so, Marty thought, than was justified by the question. Benton threw a second quick glance at his wife. She stood with her hand on his arm, looking at Marty, saying nothing.

Phalen spoke sharply. "Why did you go there?"

"I — I owe him some money."

"Then you dropped in to make a payment?" Marty could see that Ruth Benton was hearing of this debt for the first time.

"Yeah — I owed him."

Phalen took an untidy fistful of penciled notes from his pocket while Benton tensed — a little like a man stepping out into the rain — and said, "I borrowed a hundred and fifty dollars from him. I've been paying off for ten months, now. Twenty-five bucks a month."

Marty said, "Then you've already paid the principle and a hundred dollars interest."

Phalen fumbled doggedly with his notes. "That's illegal. Welch was a loan shark. Why did you go on paying?"

"I — it was — Welch is — well, he's a pretty tough boy."

"Not any more. He's dead."

Benton had been staring at the floor. He jerked his head up. As he did so, his wife's hand went around his arm, gripping hard.

"Somebody got sore and stabbed him in the neck with his own letter opener."

Marty said, "We figure it could have been done by someone who refused to go on paying forever."

"Maybe so," Benton said with some bewilderment. "But why me?"

"Was Welch dead when you got there?" Phalen snapped.

"No. He was all right then."

"I'm afraid you'll have to come downtown for questioning, Benton. We've got more than a hunch on this thing."

Benton did not react to any great extent. Slow of thought, he finally shrugged and said, "Well, if you say I gotta go, I guess I've got to."

Immediately upon Phalen's words, Ruth Benton had turned and left the room. Now she returned, carrying a beige cashmere coat. "I'm going too," she said.

Benton picked up a jacket from the lounge. He kept his eyes lowered, as though from shame. "You'd better not, hon. You better just stay here and —"

"I'm going."

Benton shrugged.

She slipped into the coat and Marty glanced at Phalen, who scowled at a worn spot in the rug. "I guess there's no law to keep you at home, Mrs. Benton. Let's get started."

They went out to the car and Marty herded the two into the back seat and then paused before climbing in after them. Phalen was standing at the curb reshuffling those eternal notes of his. Most detectives carried notebooks, but Phalen leaned toward an accumulation of odds and ends jotted down on anything handy. This slop-

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piness annoyed Marty at times. He had worked with Phalen for six months — ever since his assignment to Homicide — and the veteran detective impressed him as a bill collector rather than an officer; a man with a messy handful of debts to society, trotting around town demanding payment.

Phalen said, "I got a possible lead from Toothy Heimer on that suspect St. Louis wired us about. Toothy says he's hanging around a dance hall on Eighth Street."

Marty's irritation sharpened. He wanted to say, *Look, we've got a woman here whose world has just been knocked out from under her; a woman who is suffering, and you stand there mumbling about dance halls. Let's stick to the important thing.* But he checked himself and climbed into the car as Phalen stuffed the notes into his side pocket and got in behind the wheel.

Ruth Benton was squeezed in between Marty and her husband. She sat with her knees tight together, one hand in her coat pocket, the other, holding Benton's arm. She stared straight ahead, the shock of this new and terrible ill-fortune reflecting only through her eyes. Marty felt an urge to say something, to give a word of comfort. But it seemed cruel to build false hopes and he could have done nothing else. Benton was in a grim position.

So the trip was made in silence, through mid-evening traffic, downtown to City Hall, into the police garage and up the elevator to the third floor. Halfway down the hall leading to the Squad Room and Interrogation, Marty said, "You can wait there, Mrs. Benton. I'm afraid we haven't any better accommodations." He pointed to a bench.

"I can't go with him?"

"No. You'll have to wait."

Phalen scowled at the delay. His stomach was giving him trouble and he loosened his belt a notch. Ruth Benton sat down on the bench and put her heels against the supporting bar along the front. She folded her hands tightly in her lap.

"Why don't you go home, Mrs. Benton?" Phalen asked abruptly. "There's nothing you can do here."

"I'll wait."

Phalen shrugged and they took Benton into Interrogation.

Phalen had his coat off and was chewing on a cold cigar. He took it out of his mouth and said, "Why not save time, Benton? Why not admit that you got tired of being milked by that loan shark — that you saw red for a minute and sliced his throat before you knew what you were doing? It wouldn't be such a tough rap. Juries hate loan sharks."

"But I didn't kill him. I paid my twenty-five bucks and left."

"Not right away. You went into the broom closet and washed your hands."

This startled Benton. "I —"

Marty said, "There was a witness. We told you this wasn't just a hunch. We've got solid stuff to go on."

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"A witness? I didn't see anybody at Welch's."

"A man named Harper. He lives across the hall from Welch and kills time by keeping an eye on his neighbors. He saw you go into Welch's apartment and come out again. He saw you dodge into the broom closet to wash the blood off. He saw you come out again and head for the stairs."

Phalen barked, "Why didn't you use the elevator, Benton? In too much of a hurry?"

Benton waved a vague hand. "Now wait a minute, you guys — "

"We've got you cold, Benton, so why waste our time? Welch kept a list of his clients on a pad — in the order they came in and paid. Your name was on the bottom. That backs up Harper's testimony. He said nobody went into Welch's apartment after you left."

"But listen," Benton floundered. "That broom closet. I was looking for a washroom. That's what I thought it was. I just looked in the door and when I found it wasn't, I turned around and left."

"Uh-huh — you sure did. You left blood on the edge of the mop sink in there. What do you want to bet it'll be the same type as Welch's?"

Benton pawed at his shirt pocket until Marty leaned forward and gave him a cigarette. Phalen pointed his cigar and said, "Your wife's sitting out there on a hard bench in a drafty hall. Why not give her a break? Cooperate with us so she can go home."

Marty coughed and turned away to cover the snort of laughter that welled up at Phalen's sally. When he turned back, Phalen was pulling on his coat. "We got no more time to waste," Phalen said. "Lock him up. We've got to get on with our work." He strode toward the door. "I'll be in the Squad Room."

Marty did not expect any trouble, but he held Benton by the wrist as he walked him down the hall toward Detention — down the hall toward the bench where Ruth Benton sat. She watched, hopefully, as they approached. Benton said, "Hon, I wish you'd go home. It's no good — you sitting here waiting."

Her eyes were on Marty, questioning wordlessly. Marty said, "Your husband is right, Mrs. Benton. There's nothing you can do for him."

The hope died. "I'll wait," she said.

On the way back to the Squad Room, Marty stopped again. "Maybe you'd like something, Mrs. Benton. A hot cup of coffee? I can send out for it." Her heels were pressed tight against the brace, her hands folded tight in her lap. She shook her head. "No thanks." There was a moment of silence while they stared at each other. Then Ruth Benton said, "I'll wait." She spoke as though forestalling an order to leave.

"I guess that's your privilege," Marty said, almost brusquely, and hurried on down the hall.

Phalen had his notes scattered out over a desk in the Squad Room. He

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was frowning at them, fussing with them, adding data with the chewed stub of a pencil. He looked up as Marty entered. His diaphragm jerked. His lips twisted. "Blasted heartburn!" he muttered. "Ate too much for supper."

"Those other leads on Welch," Marty said, "hadn't we better run them out?"

"What leads do you mean?"

"Donna Spencer for one. That cigarette girl who did six months on the dope charge. Welch was running around with her. Maybe we ought to bring her in and —"

"If we have to. But nine chances out of ten, Benton's our pigeon and I think he'll crack. Give him a little time."

"But I don't think it's right to sit back on our heels and wait for something to happen!"

Marty had spoken more hotly than he had intended and Phalen turned in surprise. "What do you mean, sit back on our heels? Do mine look round? This department's undermanned and we're up to our necks in unfinished business!"

Phalen was right. Marty could think of no quick answer. Phalen lifted his hands, palms upward, and said, "Just because that dame out there takes it so hard is no reason for us to strip our gears. Her troubles haven't even started yet. Wait till the going gets rough."

Marty's anger was directed at himself as much as at Phalen. Possibly more so, because Phalen had logic to back him up where Marty's protests were based on sympathy, a thing of secondary importance in police work. "She looks so damn pathetic," he muttered, lamely, "sitting there with —"

"Don't let it throw you, kid. Plenty of homely women have troubles too. Now how about you running down that dance hall lead for the St. Louis police? They've helped us out and we ought to cooperate."

"Okay."

Phalen sorted through his notes like a philatelist selecting a rare stamp. "Here's the address."

Marty took the slip and turned on his heel.

"Hey, wait a minute."

"Yes?"

Phalen was gently massaging his stomach. "Tell you what I'll do. While you're gone, I'll duck over to Welch's place and give it another look-see. There were a couple of little points —"

"Don't let it interrupt anything important!" Marty made no effort to hide the sarcasm as he strode from the Squad Room. He resented being placated like a schoolboy — especially when he knew Phalen had no intention of going to Welch's apartment. Phalen felt that Benton was the killer and he was going to play it that way. And, Marty conceded in frustration, he was probably right.

As Marty passed Ruth Benton in the hall, the only words he could think of were, *Why don't you go home?* He started to walk on.

"Mr. Kyle."

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Marty stopped. "Yes?"

"It was my fault."

He went back and sat down on the bench. This was the way cases broke sometimes; quietly; from unexpected sources. "Why do you say that?"

She smoothed her coat and searched for words. Marty said, "Suppose you tell me about it."

She ran her fingers over the beige cashmere sleeve. "This coat is very expensive. It cost John a hundred and fifty dollars."

"It's a lovely coat."

"I saw it in the window at Hildebrand's. John said we couldn't afford it and I said we could borrow the money, but we had a loan on the furniture already and they wouldn't give us any more."

"I see."

"We had kind of a — a fight, then. I said we were always too poor to do anything but pay on the house and buy food. Never any nice things. Then one night he brought the coat home to me and I was so happy I never asked him where he got the money." She lifted her hands and put them back in her lap. "So it was really my fault."

"Did your husband tell you he killed Welch?"

She tightened as though he had slapped her. Fear and panic, trapped hopelessly in her eyes, struggled for escape. But there was a high wall between her emotions and her voice. She spoke calmly. "No. You misunderstood me. I meant this whole thing. If it hadn't been for me John would have never borrowed money from Welch. Then none of this would have happened."

Marty looked at his watch. "It's almost 10 o'clock, Mrs. Benton. Why don't you go home and get a little rest?"

"I'll wait."

Marty got up and went on down the hall. He got a car from the basement garage and drove it out into traffic. "Why don't women stay where they belong?" he muttered savagely.

A group called the Dixie Six was blasting mad discord against the ceiling of the Eighth Street Ballroom. Marty flashed his badge at the door, went inside, and stood at the edge of the dance floor. His over-all impression was one of frenzy. Itemized, this chaos broke down into a hundred or so writhing, twisting couples, all of whom seemed bent upon breaking their bones the hard way. The confusion swept past Marty in a vague circle. One perspiring, towheaded youngster paused to spin his partner like an open umbrella and grin at Marty. "The cats are sure crazy, tonight," he said. Marty grinned back but the couple had already been swept away.

Marty turned suddenly and went back to where he had seen some telephone booths. He dialed a number and waited. A female voice answered. He said, "Hello, Janet."

"Marty! Is everything all right?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Well, no reason, I suppose. I'm just

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rather surprised to get a call from you during working hours."

"Any law against a man calling his wife to say hello?" He smiled and visualized her sitting at the phone, probably in her blue dressing gown.

"Of course not. I think it's wonderful."

"Nicky in bed?"

"Hours ago."

"Okay. See you when I sign out."

"Do you think you'll be late?"

"I hope not. Goodbye."

"'Bye, darling."

He hung up and went back where he'd come from. He stood against the wall and almost half an hour passed before a pale, buck-toothed cat paused beside him to light a cigarette and speak through unmoving lips. "It's the red-headed guy in the corner — the one talking to the brunette in the green dress."

Marty made no sign of acknowledgement. Such a thing could conceivably have cost the informer his life. Instead, Marty moved away and a few minutes later came to the side of the red-headed man. He took the man by the wrist and spoke in a low voice. "You're wanted downtown, Sands. Want to see my badge before we go?" He glanced at the girl. "Run along, sister. Your boy friend's on ice."

The man scowled and tried to pull away. Marty's grip tightened, twisting the arm into an unnatural position. "What is this?" Sands asked. "My name's Archer. I —"

"Your name is Sands and you're going back to St. Louie." Marty pressed against him and slid a hand under his jacket. The hand came away palming a gun that Marty dropped into his pocket. The girl had taken two steps backward. Now she turned away and walked swiftly across the hall, not once glancing back.

There was no trouble until they were out on the sidewalk a dozen feet from the police car. Then Sands rebelled. Trying to break away, he threw a wild fist that skidded off Marty's right cheekbone.

Marty hit him — a short, solid smash under the heart. Sands gasped and sagged as Marty moved him roughly to the car and threw him into the back seat and dived in after him. He opened the storage compartment and before Sands knew what had happened, he found himself handcuffed to the steel bar running along the back of the front seat and put there for just such emergencies.

Marty got out and found a uniformed patrolman standing by the car. "Need any help?" the patrolman asked.

"Not with an even dozen of his kind." Marty growled savagely, got in behind the wheel, and drove back to the station.

After he disposed of his prisoner, he headed for the Squad Room — back down the hall past the bench. Ruth Benton sat there with her heels pressed against the support bar and her hands folded tightly in her lap. Only her eyes moved as they fol-

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lowed Marty who walked straight down the center of the hall looking neither to the left nor the right.

Phalen was still at the desk frowning at his eternal scraps of paper. "You can tear up the one about St. Louis," Marty said. "Wire them and tell them to come and get their baby."

Phalen looked up, pleasantly surprised. "Nailed him, huh? That's fine. We'll get this mess cleaned up yet."

Marty sat down opposite Phalen and reached for a pad. He began writing. Phalen yawned and patted his stomach. "Feel better," he said. "Heartburn's gone. You making out the report?"

"Uh-huh."

"Fine. Give me the pad when you get through. I've got one to make out myself."

"Okay."

"That Benton case. I cleaned it up."

Marty stopped writing and raised his head slowly. "Benton cracked?"

"No. I went over to Welch's place while you were gone. I got to thinking about the bloodstain in the broom closet while we were driving in with Benton. The way it was kind of smeared on the side of the sink that way. A man covering his tracks would maybe be more careful."

"Maybe — maybe not."

"Sure. Nothing's for certain. But it made me start thinking about Harper. We'd have gotten to him in due time, but you were in such an all-fired sweat —" A half smile quirked his lips. "Anyhow, I threw it at him and he cracked in about five minutes. He'd borrowed heavy and Welch had him over a barrel real good." Phalen looked at his watch with marked satisfaction. "Not bad. A murder squeal all wrapped up and not eight hours old."

Marty toyed with his pen. "Have you released Benton?"

"Not yet. Haven't had time. Why don't you go down and get him and give him back to Lamb Eyes?"

Marty looked up quickly, but Phalen's expression was without guile. Marty got up and went out to the bench in the hall and said, "We're releasing your husband, Mrs. Benton. Sergeant Phalen just finished clearing him. You can wait for him down in the lobby." He hurried away without giving her a chance to reply.

He signed Benton out of Detention and said, "We're sorry to have inconvenienced you. I'll send you home in a car."

Benton grinned. "Skip it. We'll take the bus. It'll be a pleasure."

"Your wife is waiting for you in the lobby."

At 4:30, Marty and Phalen were standing on the sidewalk in front of the station. Phalen yawned expansively. He said, "A good trick, Marty. We got a lot cleaned up."

Marty said, "Look — I owe you an apology."

"What for?"

"The way I blew my top on the Welch squeal. I'm sorry."

Phalen slapped him on the shoulder.

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"Don't be silly. I used to be that way myself. Any woman waiting for a husband in trouble — I'd see my own Gertie sitting out there. But I learned. You got to treat them like an auditor treats a row of numbers. You got to take it in stride. Else there'll always be a big-eyed dame waiting to give you a hard time. And kids too. Kids are the toughest."

"I suppose you're right. How about a cup of coffee?"

"I think I'll amble on home. Gert'll have breakfast ready. Besides, my feet hurt. See you tonight."

Marty walked toward the parking lot and his Chevvy coupe. He took a deep breath. The promise of dawn was over the city and he was suddenly lifted in spirit. Phalen was right, of course. Phalen knew it was nothing but a damn turtle race and he'd grown a hard, thick shell. Marty smiled. Probably he himself would finally get tired of having a hard time and he too would grow a hard shell. Yeah, treat them all like a row of numbers.

It would be a long time, though — a long time.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON**

TITLE: ***Star Witness***

TYPE: Western Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Clay Warren

LOCA E: Cuervo Grande, New Mexico

TIME The Present

COMMENTS: *The author adds a new and extremely interesting* modus moriendi *to the Manual of Murder Methods . . .*

THE RIFLE WAS A WINCHESTER .44, latest center-fire model, and Brett Chanson knew how to use it. He lay prone under a greasewood bush on a high bank overlooking the dry ravine called Arroyo Seco. A rock gave steady rest to the weapon's barrel as he sighted it at Clay Warren.

At this easy range, barely more than a hundred yards, Brett Chanson couldn't miss. Warren, a tall young man and broad across the shoulders, made a handsome target out there as he dug postholes along the south line of his claim. Yesterday he'd hauled a load of cedar posts and dropped them off, one about every fifteen feet along the line.

The New Mexico sun spotlighted him. His sombrero was tipped back, exposing a zone of white high on his forehead. Below this, his face, glistening with sweat now, had the color of fresh-smelted copper. Clay Warren stood with legs wide apart, motionless, except for the energetic movement of his arms. Methodically he dug, making the holes three feet deep so that each post would be secure for a long time to come.

Brett Chanson thumbed back the hammer of his rifle. He caught Warren's chest full in his sights, and for half a minute more he held his aim, his finger firm on the trigger. Then discretion whispered, "Don't be a fool. They'll know who did it. Your motive's too obvious."

Reluctantly his trigger finger relaxed, his eyes blazing with frustrated bitterness. Yes, his motive was too obvious. As easy to spot as Monte

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Chanson was, sitting in jail now awaiting trial for the killing of a bartender. To that killing there'd been one witness, and only one — *Clay Warren*. If Clay testified in court, Brett knew his brother Monte would hang. If he should dry-gulch Warren now, just a week before the trial, even a dumb sheriff like Pancho Sandoval would guess the how and why of it.

Brett watched sullenly as Warren finished a posthole and dug three more down the line. His buckskin horse, reins dragging, was cropping bunch grass nearby. In a little while Warren stopped digging and walked to the pile of posts lying on the ground. He picked one of them up — nine feet of green-cedar, eight inches thick at the butt — and plunked it into a hole. Even for a man of muscle it was heavy work, but by the time he was ready to quit work, all but ten holes had posts in them.

Brett Chanson watched him mount and lope away toward the cabin he'd built at the far end of the homestead. It was a half-section claim, taken out under the Enlarged Act of the year before. To enclose it completely, Clay Warren would need to build three miles of fence.

A sly smile shaded Brett's face as he retreated down the hill to his own horse. He saw now how it could be done, a scheme far less crude than sniping from ambush and one which would give him a perfect alibi. Details clicked in his mind as he reined homeward toward the Diamond C ranch.

The Diamond C barn was the only building there higher than one story. Everything else was low, flat-roofed, with plastered adobe walls. There was a bodega, a Spanish-style storeroom, not in use now and dating from the more prosperous days of old Cass Chanson, Brett's father. This and the other outbuildings formed a quadrangle, with a pulley well in the middle. At the top of the quadrangle stood the living house, a single cottonwood shading it and hollyhocks blooming at its gate.

Brett stalled his horse at the barn, feeding it with *vega* hay from the loft. He left the saddle on; after moonset tonight Brett knew he would be riding — and where.

He went to the house, where Vesta, his younger sister, had supper ready. "Did you see Monte? How is he, Brett?" she asked immediately, anxiety and despair in her voice. She supposed Brett had been to town to confer with the defense lawyer and to visit Monte in jail.

"I been busy with the stock," Brett told her. "Tomorrow I'll ride in and see Monte."

She served him beef stew and frijoles, not eating, herself. Worry lines were on her dark oval face, making her seem older than her twenty-two years.

Over the mantel beyond Brett, she could see a portrait of their father. Cass Chanson had been a big, handsome man, range-bred and range-toughened, and Vesta thought how strikingly her brothers resembled

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him. The same black eyes and hair, the same square chin and straight mouth, the same swarthy good looks. In shape, though, the faces were dissimilar. Brett's was roundish, Monte's rather long and narrow. In spite of a strong family resemblance, no one could ever mistake Brett for Monte.

A little of their mother, Vesta thought, was in both of them. She couldn't remember much about her mother. She knew, though, that her father had married the hostess of a Tucson gambling hall and that she'd lived only long enough to bear him two sons and a daughter. One of those sons, Brett, had become a gambler, himself. The blood of his mother, people said. Reckless at cards, Brett had lost most of the Diamond C cattle and had put the rest under heavy lien at the Cuervo Grande bank.

They'd been desperate for cash, but it was Monte, not Brett, who'd gone after it with a gun, robbing a saloon and killing the bartender before the eyes of a witness. A witness who, in court next week, could and would point a deadly finger at him. . . .

After moonset, when the house was dark and quiet, Brett Chanson slipped down to the barn. Vesta, he'd made sure, was asleep in her room. He led his saddled horse out the back door, stepped into the saddle, and took an unsloping trail toward Blue Mesa. It wasn't far. Just above the scrub-oak line Brett came to the shack of old Pop Samples. Pop was a prospector who used the shack on occasion, but who was now down in town. A pile of gray-green tailings told where Pop had driven a test tunnel into the hill.

Brett entered the shack and struck a match. Tools and explosives were stored there. Brett helped himself to a box of dynamite; he slipped a smaller box, containing fulminatory caps, into his coat pocket. Minutes later he was riding back down the trail with the dynamite box balanced across the pummel in front of him.

It was midnight when he came to the Diamond C. Everything was dark there. Brett dismounted behind the unused bodega. He carried the dynamite into the old storeroom and lighted a lantern.

It was a 50-stick box. Brett opened it and took out twenty sticks of high explosive; these he taped together into a compact fagot. Cautiously he embedded a fulminating cap into the top end of one of the sticks; on a bodega shelf he found a needle-sharp horseshoe nail and some wax. He stood the nail, point down, on the fulminating cap and built a cone of wax around it, so that it remained firmly in place there. If anyone were to strike the nail with a hammer, its point would be driven into the fulminator, exploding it, and, in turn, exploding all the dynamite.

Wtith his bound fagot of sticks Brett left the bodega and mounted his horse. He walked the horse north, toward Arroyo Seco.

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So cautiously did Brett ride that the five miles took him two hours. A row of posts loomed in the dark. No wire had been strung on them yet. In line from the last post were ten unfilled postholes, spaced fifteen feet apart and dug yesterday by Clay Warren.

Each hole was a neat cylinder, as digger-made holes always are. Brett took his fagot to the last hole and, lying prone, he lowered it into the hole with the fulminated end up. He made sure that the waxed horseshoe nail was still in place, like the cocked firing pin of a gun.

A heavy blow would cause detonation. And what heavier blow would one want than a hundred-pound cedar post dropped butt end into the hole?

Brett Chanson rode homeward at a lope. At least two hours of night remained when he pulled up back of the bodega. One more thing to be done. In case of a search for evidence by the sheriff, he must get rid of the rest of that dynamite.

It was simple enough. Brett carried the box a hundred yards to the Diamond C stock pond. He tossed the sticks out into the water, one by one, where they would deteriorate and become harmless; he did the same with the remaining fulminatory caps. The box itself he broke into small pieces and pushed them down a badger hole. Then he slipped into his room and went to bed.

At daylight he heard Vesta stirring in the kitchen and waited until she called breakfast before joining her. She gave him an odd look.

"What were you doing in the bodega last night, Brett?" Her level eyes searched him. "I woke up and saw lantern light down there. At the bodega window."

"Couldn't sleep," Brett told her, working hard to keep from showing his surprise. "Remembered there was some aspirin in the storeroom, so I went and got it."

Maybe, he thought, she didn't believe him. But what difference did it make? If she took a look in the bodega she'd find nothing at all.

And what about the sheriff? The sheriff would find Clay Warren dead, blown to bits while setting a post line. So what? Often a man engaged in digging holes carries a stick or two of dynamite with him for use in rocky ground or in hardpan too tough for his digging tool. Dumb old Pancho Sandoval would conclude that Warren had so equipped himself, and that in some way the dynamite had exploded, while being handled. What other conclusion could there be?

Brett ate breakfast hurriedly and then set off for town. All of Cuervo Grande must be his alibi against the death of Clay Warren.

Clay Warren rode to his work early that morning. Today he could set posts in the holes already dug, and then dig twenty or 30 more holes. Work was good. It kept a man from brooding about things that couldn't be helped. Like testifying in court

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against a neighbor. But it had to be done. With his own eyes he'd seen Monte Chanson rob and kill the bartender. And he must say so on the witness stand, no matter how badly it hurt a girl who happened to be Monte's sister.

Gravely he rode toward the post line. Usually he was just the opposite — blithe, happy, eager for life. Until recently he'd ridden with a song on his lips, a jaunty young rangeman, blue-eyed and blond. Now he frowned as he thought, "Why does it have to be me? After this she'll have no truck with me. Blood's thicker'n water."

He came to the post line and dismounted. He lugged a cedar post to the first open hole and dropped it in. The heavy butt struck bottom with jarring impact.

Clay tamped dirt around it and made it firm. There were still nine empty holes with a post lying beside each. He planted another one, then another.

His shadow shortened and the sun grew warmer. He looked up, saw a buzzard circle overhead, and he wondered if the Diamond C had lost a beef somewhere near. Clay, except for a team and saddle horse, had no stock of his own yet. He dropped a post into the next hole. It hit the bottom like a pile driver. He tamped it solid and then loafed through a cigarette, all the while brooding about dark-eyed Vesta Chanson.

Post by post he progressed toward the last hole. When he finally came to it, he took a canteen from his saddle and took a drink. Then to work again. He picked up a post and staggered with it toward the one remaining hole. Good, solid heavy cedar. Planted three feet deep, it would last forever.

Clay poised the butt directly over the hole and made ready to let go, when a sharp explosion hit the air and he heard a bullet zing over his head. Whirling, he spotted a puff of smoke at the brink of a gulch about two hundred yards away.

Clay pushed the post aside and ran for his horse. He wore no belt gun, but a carbine was in his saddle scabbard. "Let's get him, Buck," he yelled.

He raced to the gulch and rode down into its bed, where he found an empty rifle shell. The sniper had used a Winchester .44.

Brett Chanson! It had to be him. With Clay Warren dead, there'd be no one to testify against Monte. The motive was perfect.

On the sandy bed of the gulch horse tracks were clear, and Clay plucked his carbine from the scabbard and spurred his horse to a gallop. Shooting it out with Brett couldn't get him in any worse with Vesta than he was already. In any case, he had to track the sniper to make sure. If these tracks led to the Diamond C ranch, guilt would be implacably tied on Brett Chanson.

Clay followed the trail a mile up the gulch and came out in a cedar canyon where gravel made the tracks less

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plain. Their dimness slowed pursuit. The horse ahead had small shod hoofs, and Clay had to follow at a walk. The tracks led him up over a hogback, through dense cedars, and down into another draw. There they doubled back toward the open flats.

Clay was too far behind now for any hope of overtaking the sniper, who seemed to be heading back toward the fence line. "Maybe he's angling for another crack at me," Clay muttered to himself.

The ground was sandy again and the hoofprints were easily followed. They led Clay to the exact spot from which he'd started — to the unfilled posthole of his fence line. And there he saw that the sniper had dismounted.

Clay wondered why. Maybe, he reasoned, the sniper had scouted the scene of his planned crime early this morning, before withdrawing for the ambush. Maybe he'd dropped a clue here. Remembering it later, he'd circled back to pick it up. At any rate, a bootprint in the sand beside the posthole made it clear that the sniper had dismounted here.

Suddenly everything came into focus for him. Open-mouthed he stared at the bootprint. He dismounted for a closer look. It was a — a girl's boot! Vesta's! Of course. She had exactly the same motive as Brett. They both wanted to silence him. He patted the neck of his horse wearily, then remounted. She sure had played him for a fool.

A mile short of the Diamond C he saw an old man on a mule. The rider was approaching at right angles from the direction of Cuervo Grande. Clay knew him. This was old Pop Samples heading toward his prospecting shack in the hills.

Clay waited till the old man came up. "Hi, Pop. Just come from Cuervo?"

"Yep."

"Did you see Brett Chanson there?"

"Yep. About two hours ago he was settin' on the hotel porch talkin' to Monte's lawyer."

"Thanks."

Clay rode on, following the tracks of Vesta Chanson's shod pony. No doubt about it now. Brett had been in town all morning.

The tracks led Clay straight into the Diamond C ranch yard. The pony was tethered there, a Winchester .44 in its saddle scabbard. The pony's flanks were flecked from a hard ride. Vesta herself was at the well, drawing a bucket of water. She was booted and spurred. She flushed as Clay Warren rode up.

"Mornin', Vesta." Clay's tone held more sorrow than anger. "You dropped somethin' over by my fence line. Thought you might want to keep it for a souvenir."

Reaching from his saddle, he held up an empty rifle shell. He waited for her to answer. When she didn't, he whirled and rode back toward his homestead.

Vesta watered her pony, unsaddled, and turned the pony loose. She hitched a mare to a buggy and tied it

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in front of the house. Then she went inside and packed a small trunk.

When her brother returned from town late that afternoon, she was seated in the buggy, the trunk beside her. "I've been waiting for you, Brett."

He blinked at the trunk. "Whatsa matter, Sis? You goin' somewhere?"

"I am. To the hotel in town. I can't live with you any longer, Brett. Last night I saw a light in the bodega. I saw you come out with a package and ride north. I went to the bodega and found dynamite. And caps. The dynamite box said fifty sticks, and twenty were missing. One cap was gone from the cap box."

"So you snooped on me?" That, and a surly resentment which mottled his swarthy face, was his only response.

"At breakfast you lied to me about aspirin. When you rode away to town I went to the bodega again and found you'd removed the other thirty sticks. That proved you were afraid to have them found here. I following your tracks of the night, and they led me to Clay Warren's fence line. I saw Clay dropping posts into holes and guessed the truth. You'd charged one of those holes with dynamite!"

Brett jeered at her savagely. "So you snitched on me! You told on your own blood!"

"No, Brett, I didn't. We've been disgraced enough as it is. If I tell that you tried to murder a witness, it will only make the case against Monte worse. All I did was fire a rifle shot over Clay's head."

Brett stared. "What for?"

"To warn him. And to make him chase me. Which he did. I led him into the cedars and then doubled back to the posthole. I took twenty sticks of dynamite from it, all bundled and capped and triggered with a horseshoe nail."

Her brother went livid. "What," he demanded hoarsely, "did you do with it?"

"That's why I waited for you, Brett. To tell you I've hidden it in a safe place." Her eyes blazed a challenge. "And if anything ever happens to Clay Warren, I'll show that evidence to the sheriff."

She touched a whip to the mare and the buggy rolled away toward town. Brett spurred his horse and caught up with her. "Look, Vesta," he pleaded. "I was only doin' it for Monte."

She stopped her rig for a moment and looked at him, bewildered. Then she used her whip and the buggy rolled on. Once out of Brett's sight, she burst into tears.

A week later, court was in session at Cuervo Grande. Monte Chanson, on trial for his life, sat between his attorney and Sheriff Pancho Sandoval.

The prosecutor called his star witness, and Clay stepped forward and was sworn. The room was packed, and he saw Vesta Chanson in the third row. Her dark eyes seemed to plead with him desperately. Like everyone else, she knew that Monte's fate lay in the hands of this single witness.

"You will tell the court," the prose-

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cutor directed, "exactly what happened on the night of June tenth."

"I rode into town about midnight," Clay said. "Everything seemed to be closed up except Barney Hogan's place. So I went in there for a nightcap."

"Hogan ran a bar called *El Caballero Alegre?*" the prosecutor asked.

"That's right. The Merry Cavalier. But things weren't merry when I walked in there. A man was holding Barney up with a gun. And Barney, right hand high, was using his left to pass the cash across the bar to him."

"You saw and recognized the bandit?"

"His back was to me. But I could see his face in the back-bar mirror." Clay paused. Then, "He was Monte Chanson."

"Were you armed, Mr. Warren?"

"No. I never pack anything but a saddle gun," Clay said.

"What happened next?"

"Monte heard me come in, back of him, and he saw my reflection in the mirror. It looked like a spot he'd have to shoot his way out of. So he let go two quick shots — one at Hogan, one at me. The one at me came just as he whirled my way, and it creased me. Knocked me out for a minute. Next I knew, the sheriff was there and Hogan was dead."

"Look at the accused. Is he the man you saw shoot Hogan?" the prosecutor demanded.

Clay turned toward Monte Chanson. He looked at Monte's thatch of black hair, his jet-black eyes, the square chin and straight-line mouth, the long, narrow face, handsome even now in spite of its pallor. "That's the man," Clay said.

"*Your* witness." The prosecutor waved a tolerant hand at the defense counsel.

But selection of a jury had expended most of the morning, and it was now noontime. "This court," the judge announced, "will recess till 1 o'clock."

Clay lunched at a counter across from the courthouse. He tried not to think about Monte Chanson. Although he'd never known the man very well, he'd always liked Monte. Most of all he tried not to think about Vesta.

Clay left the lunchroom fretfully. Directly after the recess the defense lawyer would start barking at him, trying to trip him up. To brace himself, Clay went a few doors up the street for a glass of beer. The bar he entered was Hogan's old place, now run by Arturo Gonzalez.

The only other customer was Sheriff Pancho Sandoval, who sat alone at a rear table. Pancho was brown and fat, sleepily indolent, too lacking in energy, people said, to bat a fly.

Clay stood at the bar, where Arturo served him. The barroom clock said ten to one. Clay sipped his drink, wishing he didn't have to go back to the courtroom, wishing he didn't have to meet the hurt eyes of a girl in the third row.

He raised the glass. Over it he saw

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his own reflection in the back-bar mirror. It was a long, high mirror, reaching the full length of the bar. In it Clay could see his own face and the back of the bartender's head.

Then he saw the face of another customer who'd just entered from the street. The image startled Clay. It was Monte Chanson's! Yet it couldn't be!

Clay turned his head slowly. He looked at the other customer. It was not Monte, but Brett!

Brett, with his round, swarthy face. Yet the mirror showed the same face lengthened and narrowed. Clay looked again at his own reflection. It, too, seemed more oblong than it should be. Then it came to him.

The mirror wasn't true! It slightly magnified an up-and-down dimension and shortened a crosswise dimension. The distortion wasn't grotesque, just enough to make a round image look oblong. Just enough to make Brett's face, bolstered by a natural family resemblance, look like Monte's!

The impact of it made Clay turn to Brett Chanson and blurt out, "It *wasn't* Monte! It was *you!* I got fooled by the mirror. It was you I saw kill Hogan. And that's just what I'll tell 'em when they cross-examine me in court."

"Oh, no, you won't!" Fury rolled through Brett like a storm. He drew from the hip and his gun cracked. Clay, unarmed, just stood there.

But he didn't fall. It was Brett who sagged to the floor, one arm extended before him. Clay turned, and saw Sheriff Pancho Sandoval with a smoking .45 in one hand and a schooner of beer in the other.

The fat man was still lazily seated. He had moved nothing but his wrist, but that had been enough.

Cross-examined in the courtroom, Clay reversed his testimony and explained why. Amid the hubbub which followed, the judge ordered the entire jury to the barroom to see for themselves. Each juryman could look at his own face in the back-bar mirror. Each juryman did, and was convinced. Especially when the oldest of the county's old-timers sauntered in.

"You folks," Pop Samples cackled, "got so used to that old mirror you didn't pay no attention to it any more. But me, I recollect when old Don Juan Pacheco set up this bar. He had the mirror made that way apurpose so his customers would laugh at themselves and be jolly. That's how he come to call it *El Caballero Alegre*, The Merry Cavalier."

A moment later, Vesta was rushing hysterically into Monte's arms.

It was a long, lonesome month before Clay saw her again. He was mounted on his horse atop a cedared butte, looking down upon open flats, when he saw Vesta ride by out there.

But she didn't see him. Her gaze was fixed on a soaring hawk.

Clay saw her whip a Winchester .44 from her saddle scabbard and aim upward. She fired. The hawk came plummeting to earth.

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A warm light broke over Clay. All at once he wanted to shout. He plunged his horse down that cedared butte and took out after her.

He caught up with her, just as before, at the ranch-yard well. She was drawing a bucket of water.

"I was dumber'n a locoed burro," Clay grinned, "for thinking you tried to hit me that time. You missed me on purpose. That slug zinged ten feet over my head. When *you* plunk at a hawk, you don't miss."

She met his eyes, flushing.

"You figured to warn me about somethin'," Clay prodded. "What was it?"

But even now she couldn't bear to confess Brett's treachery. "Please let's not talk about it," she said. "Won't you stay for supper, now that you're here? Monte's home, and he likes you. He wants to be friendly." She added shyly, "And so do I, Clay."

Clay took the water bucket from her.

Then they walked to the house together.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

R. J. Tilley's "The Devil and Mr. Wooller" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. It is quite a remarkable tale to have come from a 'tec tyro. Perhaps we should not have used the word "'tec," for while the story is a mystery, and contains both a murder and a doublecross, it is also a fantasy; but the very combination of these elements is what marks the tale with distinction and the author with so much promise for the future . . . Mr. Tilley was born in the north of England (home of the Yorkshire pudding) twenty-seven years ago. At school he was advised to take up journalism as a career, but in sheer contrariness he took up commercial art instead. At the time he wrote "The Devil and Mr. Wooller" the author was earning his living as a window-display designer for a firm of shoe manufacturers — and spending many evenings "drooling at the sight of his typewriter." Do you glimpse a picture of the man? The view widens considerably when we learn "the things that really make living worthwhile" for Mr. Tilley. We quote: ". . . a girl called Pauline; the two Rays — Chandler and Bradbury; James Thurber and Arthur Miller; the paintings of Ben Shahn and the caricatures of Hoffnung; the Benny Goodman Sextet; any film directed by Elia Kazan (preferably starring Marlon Brando); and the companionship and sound sense of a handful of good friends." Yes, we begin to see the man, begin to understand how he would naturally blend crime with fantasy — naturally and supernaturally.

THE DEVIL AND MR. WOOLLER

by R. J. TILLEY

"I WONDER," ASKED MR. WOOLLER, "if I might trouble you for a match."

The Devil murmured politely, fumbled in the pockets of his light topcoat, produced a box of Swan Vestas, and proffered them. His eyes were completely devoid of human curiosity.

Mr. Wooller's hands shook as he held them cupped over the tip of his cigarette, but he felt that he could be excused this slight outlet to his excitement. Most people, on finding the Devil standing next to them at Waterloo station, would doubtless have

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screamed, fainted, taken to their heels, or possibly even expired. None of these occurred to Mr. Wooller, to whom the Devil was now a regrettably familiar figure.

"I shouldn't be doing this," he said.

The Devil raised his eyebrows.

"Smoking," explained Mr. Wooller, and coughed gently a couple of times, without removing the cigarette from his mouth. "Had my tonsils out a few weeks ago, and you know what that's like at my age. Took it out of me, in more ways than one, I don't mind saying."

The Devil nodded, sympathetically.

"Been staying with my sister down at Brighton for the week," said Mr. Wooller. "Could've stayed longer but she's got enough to do without pampering an invalid like me." He scratched the back of his neck, and felt the gun sag a little lower in his raincoat pocket. "Besides, I'll have to be getting back on the job sooner or later."

Mr. Wooller puffed jerkily, and then removed the cigarette from his mouth.

"Commercial traveling's a bigger hustle these days than it used to be. Do you," asked Mr. Wooller, greatly daring, and fixedly eyeing a slot machine on the opposite platform, "do much traveling yourself?"

The Devil smiled.

"A great deal," he said. His voice was deep and not unpleasant. "My vocation requires me to be in a great many places in the course of a year. But travel is, after all, very conducive" — he eyed Mr. Wooller in a friendly way — "to a broadening of the mind."

Mr. Wooller shuddered. He was suddenly recalling his own initial encounter with this long, lean, and frighteningly bland world traveler . . .

The printing trade of the small Midland town had been booming, and correspondingly the demand for printing inks and paper had been large. Mr. Wooller, his order book comfortably full, had been standing on the pavement edge only a few yards away from her, when the little girl in the scarlet coat was lifted as though by strings and bowled beneath the rampaging wheels of a lorry that lurched suddenly round the corner.

He heard the screech of metal on metal as the green street-corner lamp suffered a warping blow, and the death rattle of the small corner house as its bricks cascaded at absurd angles; he saw the flames that leaped thunderously skywards, and all his half-born heroism died as he flung himself flat in the dusty garden of the house in front of which he was standing, cursing the absurdly low wall that separated the property from the street.

After the explosion, numbed, deafened, and blinded by dust, Mr. Wooller rose stumblingly to his feet and ran around the fantastically blazing piles of bricks and masonry towards the dead and dying people. He tried to help when panic-stricken householders clutched at his sleeve and begged his assistance in removing belongings to a place of safety; but

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something was troubling him, and it had nothing to do with his prudent leap behind the wall when instinctive common sense had told him plainly that it was the one sane move he could have made.

Suddenly Mr. Wooller felt evil around him, and its dark and pungent presence was very frightening. Between the oily columns of smoke the sky showed blue and clear, yet to him the street was dark with more than merely smoke and sinless death. It was while he was helping to carry a cumbersome, marble-topped washstand towards the growing collection of settees, bedsteads, and gilt-framed pictures that he first saw him.

The Devil was standing at the back of a rapidly filling gap in the crowd of onlookers and appeared, oddly enough, to be causing no stir among those nearest to him. His hat was dark, adorned with a small red feather in the band, and his topcoat was light and of an excellent cut. No horns or spiked tail were in evidence before the crowd surged across Mr. Wooller's line of vision, but the spear-point mustaches and Vandyke beard were as neat as in his wildest nightmares and twitching with a sardonic impudence that could only be described as devilish.

Mr. Wooller stumbled, and his end of the washstand scraped along the pavement.

"What the . . . ," said the man in front.

"There," choked Mr. Wooller. He was sweating violently, and his pointing hand trembled. "There, at the back of the crowd. I just saw . . ."

"Look, mate," said the man ahead of him. His home was burning to a cinder, and he felt no inclination to stop and argue with Mr. Wooller. "If there's somebody over there you want to 'ave a yarn with, don't let me 'old yer back. But somebody's got to 'elp me shift this stuff, and we're not gettin' far at this rate. Charlie!" He ignored Mr. Wooller. "Come and give us a lift with this thing. Seems our friend-in-need 'ere . . ."

But Mr. Wooller had gone, edging his way desperately through the tight ranks of people. He was breathing hard and shaking dreadfully with the appalling absurdity of it all, but he never for one moment doubted either his sanity or the efficiency of his eyesight. He had seen Mephistopheles, gazing with dark and triumphant eyes at a deed of his doing that would hereafter be spoken of as an accident — a sad and terrible freak affair, brought about by the carelessness of a little girl who had started to cross the road without looking both ways.

Mr. Wooller arrived, panting, at the back of the crowd, with the picture of the child hurtling through the air, propelled by no earthly force, still hauntingly clear in his mind. The Devil had gone. In his place stood a short, stocky man in a cloth cap and muffler, a racing paper beneath his arm, and an empty pipe between his teeth. He answered Mr. Wooller's stare with an openly hostile look.

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The street was free of devils. Even as he stared dumbly about him, the oppressing darkness that only he seemed to see suddenly lifted. No trace of the Devil remained, and Mr. Wooller, seating himself on the nearest curbstone, allowed himself to be suddenly and violently sick . . .

The second occasion had been a little different.

A mild political discussion between two navvies in the bar of a public house in Hackney, where Mr. Wooller chanced to be lunching, had suddenly, and for no apparent reason, developed into a blasphemous row the like of which he had never witnessed before, even in his army days. Steadily, and with an awful deliberateness that seemed beyond their power to control, the two big men had whipped themselves into mutual states of homicidal unreasonableness.

Mr. Wooller, a little frightened, decided to get out before any blows were actually struck. He was fumbling stealthily beneath his chair for his brief case when he saw the figure in the window seat and paused, as though suddenly and miraculously carved out of stone.

There was no mistaking that dark hat, and light and expensive topcoat. The trim mustache was even neater than before, but it was the Devil as he had first seen him, only now he was fastidiously consuming bread and cheese, a beer tankard at his elbow. As Mr. Wooller heard the first jarring blow from the direction of the bar, the Devil flicked a crumb from the corner of his mouth with an inappropriately white handkerchief, rose to his feet, and passed quietly from the building.

One of the navvies died. The other was so badly cut about — they had quickly resorted to the use of shattered beer mugs — that it was a wonder he survived to go for trial. Mr. Wooller was a witness for the prosecution, but what could he say? Could he state, under oath, that he had seen a murder promoted by the Devil actually committed under the eyes of its instigator?

Mr. Wooller had no wish to go to a lunatic asylum. He committed perjury, and passed from the courtroom a respected and truthful witness to all those present, and a miserable and tortured being with a freak trick of observance to himself.

When he arrived back at his lodgings on the final day of the trial, with the knowledge that Clement Fisher, the navvy, would shortly be hanged by the neck until he was dead, Mr. Wooller sank into the basket-chair by the window of his bedroom and stared unseeingly at the neat, peacefully secure rows of rooftops that covered the neighboring estate. He was not a clever man. He shared the skepticism and doubts of the majority of his fellow-men as far as a God in Heaven and a Devil in Hell were concerned, and was filled with a hopeful belief that the solution was as black and white as that; but he was nagged consistently by the boomingly confident voice of scientific reasoning.

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When his wife had been alive, he had attended Sunday services apathetically, because she wished it, bored by the preachers, whose quotations and denunciations seemed unnecessarily riddled with italicised phrases, and subdued during the hymns, helped little by a singing voice that had maintained a constant tunelessness since childhood. Since her death, his half-hearted attendance had ceased altogether. Now, shatteringly, his doubts had been dispelled for him. A Devil existed.

Slowly, Mr. Wooller sat upright in his chair. He recalled the tankard of beer, the plate of bread and cheese. An internal system was needed to accommodate such earthly fare — a throat, a stomach, kidneys, liver, a heart to pump the black and evil blood. When on Earth, the Devil obviously assumed the bodily characteristics of man, and should surely be vulnerable to man's catastrophes. So reasoned Mr. Wooller, and as each thought was planted and took root in his mind, so the reason for his extraordinary powers of observation were revealed to him.

He rose, crossed to the bureau, and opened the middle drawer.

He took out the small brown box with the brass fastenings that lay at the back beneath his winter shirts, unlocked it with the miniature brass key on his key-chain, and took out the gun.

It was a relic of the first World War, contained three bullets, and was in perfect working order. Once a year, on the anniversary of his demobilization, Mr. Wooller removed it from its coverings, oiled it, worked the breech a few times, pointed it playfully at himself in the mirror, and replaced it in the box. For Mr. Wooller had always been an adventurer at heart, and although the only action he had witnessed had been at his desk behind the lines, no second-lieutenant had been better prepared for conflict.

Now he weighed the gun lightly and thoughtfully in his hand, and placed it in his brief case.

From that day he carried it, sometimes in the brief case, and sometimes in the pocket of his raincoat. He had no license, but he reasoned that such a formality was superfluous under the circumstances. If a man carried a revolver solely for the purpose of eliminating the Devil when next he encountered him, a legal triviality could surely be overlooked.

It was some months later that he had his tonsils removed. They had been slowly poisoning his system for some time past and his work was suffering, and although his doctor had pointed out that it was a little late in life for the operation, he had decided to undergo the indignity of the knife; then taking advantage of an open invitation, he had gone to stay with his sister at Brighton during his convalescent period. And it was while traveling back to London that he once again found himself in the Devil's presence.

Entering the restaurant car, his eye fastened on a hat and folded coat,

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resting on the rack above an aisle seat at the far end of the carriage. There was no mistaking them. Mr. Wooller's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and perspiration beaded his forehead. He wondered if he should dispense with all formalities and there and then walk down the aisle and blow the Satanic brains all over the resturant car; but then he remembered that the revolver was in his raincoat pocket in the compartment he had just left. So he sank quietly into the nearest seat, and just as quietly ordered a double brandy. The Devil, clad in respectable light tweeds, finished his meal unmolested, flicked a crumb from the corner of his mouth with what looked like the same milk-white handkerchief he had used before, and retired, presumably to his own compartment.

At Waterloo, easily spotted by a dry-mouthed and shakily determined Mr. Wooller, the Devil seemed in no hurry to leave the station. He strolled unhurriedly to another platform, halfway down which he paused, and retired to an elegantly lounging position against the nearest railings. Mr. Wooller, from his position behind a pile of luggage, noticed his quarry's steady interest in a group of men, soberly clad, standing a few yards away.

His hand taut on the butt of the lethal weapon in his pocket, Mr. Wooller hailed a passing porter.

"That bunch down there," he said, nodding sideways and slipping a half crown into the man's hand. "Do you know who they are?"

Mr. Wooller was tingling with excitement. His own gaze, forever flickering between the Devil and the group of men, failed to see the dawning of suspicion in the porter's eyes.

"Reception committee," said the man. He seemed suddenly anxious to be about his business. "From one of the embassies. 'Scuse me, guv'nor, but I've got a load of luggage to shift."

He was off, before Mr. Wooller could question him further. So that was it, thought Mr. Wooller, and wriggled his shoulders a little, as he felt the trickle of sweat down his spine. A full-blooded assassination. Somewhere in this crowd lurked a fanatic, armed with gun, bomb, or knife, ready to dispense death the moment the incoming diplomat stepped from the train. It was no time for discreet questioning and the warning of officials. That was when Mr. Wooller, making the most momentous decision of his life, had stuck an unlighted cigarette in the corner of his mouth, stepped from his hiding place, and strolling to where the Devil stood, asked him for a match . . .

Conversation, such as it had been, died, but Mr. Wooller had established his bridgehead. He stood there at the peak of his adventure, a middle-aged commercial traveler for a printing-ink manufacturer, rather shabby and more than a little afraid, clutching an old Luger in his raincoat pocket and determined at all costs to forestall the deviltry that was scheduled for that day and place.

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Sudden activity on the platform announced the approach of the train. A loudspeaker boomed. A fraction of a second before the stirring of the passengers on the platform commenced, the Devil started to move.

Slowly and majestically, he stepped forward — a true Prince of Darkness — toward the isolated group that had now stiffened into a semblance of attention.

Mr. Wooller, sweating profusely, followed a bare six feet behind.

The train slid grindingly to a halt.

There was a craning of necks among the group as a myriad doors disgorged people onto the platform, then a sudden sharp voice in a foreign tongue. The reception committee quickly and efficiently grouped itself into a flying wedge that brushed aside all opposition, then flowed smoothly into a half circle in front of a first-class carriage door.

The Devil walked straight toward them.

Mr. Wooller, horribly rattled, faltered for a split second, then he too plunged on. Surely the Devil himself would not . . . ? Mr. Wooller's eyes, stinging with the salt of his perspiration, frantically sought any movement in the crowd that would announce the assassin's position. He saw none.

The half circle of figures split suddenly into two facing lines, forming a short, narrow corridor. As the gray-bearded passenger with the dark features and the puckered brow strode forward between the ranks, the Devil halted and faced him, his hands sliding slowly from the pockets of his coat.

Mr. Wooller panicked.

In a frenzy of fear, he lurched forward, tearing his own gun from his pocket, his free hand fumbling wildly at the safety catch. He thrust the gun forward, jamming the barrel hard against the Satanic spinal column — and fired three times.

Voices rose in deafening tumult around him. Dazed, Mr. Wooller gazed upon the body of the man he had killed. He lay sprawled at the feet of his fellow-countrymen, a small, gray-bearded man from whose dark features all puckers had been miraculously erased, and whose overcoat now showed dark red stains.

Angry, brutal hands seized Mr. Wooller, and he was hurried without ceremony into a nearby office.

They were unkind enough to bring the body of the diplomat into the same room and rest it gently on the floor, directly opposite the corner where Mr. Wooller was savagely being bundled into a pair of handcuffs. When the police came to take him away, Mr. Wooller was still staring at the body, sobbing brokenly to the grim-faced men around him, "But didn't *any* of you see him, not *any* of you?"

They assured him, not unkindly, that they had not, and it was only as he was being led away that Mr. Wooller suddenly began to appreciate the amount of patient preparation and the really devilish cunning that had gone into it all.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***Double Your Money***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Ellery Queen, mystery writer, and his father, Inspector Queen

LOCALE: New York City

COMMENTS: *The Wizard of Amsterdam Ave. promised to double your money in three months — and he did! He performed other miracles too — like vanishing from a locked room.*

IF THEODORE F. GROOSS HAD DECIDED to run for Mayor of New York, he would have carried all the West Eighties between the park and the river by a record plurality, and possibly — in time — the rest of the city as well. Fortunately for the traditional parties, however, Grooss's forte was not politics but finance. He was the people's champion of sound money in an era of inflation. In a day when the dollar bought little more than fifty cents' worth of anything, Grooss's genius found a way to restore it to its par excellence. His solution was wonderful: He made each dollar, like the ameba, reproduce itself. For this feat, which he performed regularly for the benefit of all comers, he was known to some of his fervid constituents as "The Wizard of Amsterdam Avenue," but most of them called him, with homely grandeur, "Double-Your-Money" Grooss.

What Ellery called him is not to be printed.

Ellery first heard about Theodore F. Grooss from Mr. Joe Belcassazzi, head of the maintenance department of the three-story brownstone on West Eighty-Seventh Street where the Queens reside. Mr. Belcassazzi, whose only investments heretofore had been in *pasta* for his large and unappeasable family, stopped wrestling a can of furnace ashes on the sidewalk to expound to the attentive Mr. Queen the glory that was Grooss. Mr. Belcassazzi had a normally hangdog eye, but it was on fire with joy this morning.

"He's take twelve dollar twenty-

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five cents of my insurance money," cried Mr. Belcassazzi, "and in three months he give me back twenty-four dollars and fifty cents! *Madre!* You got a few bucks, Mr. Queen, you give 'em to the Wizza. Everybody's doin' it."

Mr. Queen forgot what had brought him out into the sunshine. He went round the corner to Amsterdam Avenue and stopped in here and there. Everybody was indeed doing it. Mr. Rickhardt, the butcher of Frank's Fancy Market, had already realized one hundred percent on each of two investments with Wizard Grooss, and he was weighing a third with the critical air of a member of the Stock Exchange. The widowed Mrs. Cahn of the Delicious Bakery was excitedly contemplating her second. Old Mr. Patterson of the silver shop stopped polishing a pair of antique candlesticks long enough to quaver the admission that he, too, was a satisfied client of Theodore F. Grooss's. And so it went, up and down and on both sides of the Avenue. And, Ellery suspected, in the cross streets, too.

"He's even got the school kids giving him their lunch money," Ellery protested to his father that night. "The whole neighborhood's involved, Dad. Guaranteeing to double their money in three months! Can't you do something about the fellow?"

"First I hear about him," said Inspector Queen thoughtfully. "Certainly the D.A.'s office hasn't had any complaints."

"Because he's still paying off, setting up the kill. The oldest swindle in the book!" Ellery waved his long arms menacingly. "Grooss isn't 'investing' their money. He's simply paying off investors of three months ago out of the money he's accepting today. You know how this sort of thing mushrooms once the word gets round, Dad. For each payoff he gets a dozen new suckers — he's always miles ahead of the game. The only thing is, one of these days he's going to take an unannounced vacation with a trunkful of his client's undoubled dough."

"I'll put the D.A.'s office onto him, Ellery."

"I can't wait that long! Charlie Felipez just borrowed a hundred dollars from a loan company to give to Grooss." Charlie Felipez was the war amputee who ran a newsstand in the neighborhood. "Others are pulling the same foolish stunt. Let's throw a scare into this operator, Dad. Maybe we can bluff him into doing something stupid."

The Inspector looked interested. "Anything in mind?"

"The full treatment. What are you the white-haired boy of Centre Street for?"

At 8:15 the next morning, with all arrangements made, the Queens and Sergeant Thomas Velie of the Inspector's staff called on The Wizard of Amsterdam Avenue. Early as it was, the seventh-floor corridor of the office building was packed wall to wall. Ellery winced. There was young Minnie Bender, who supported a spastic

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child by her earnings at the steam table of the 89th Street Cafeteria; he recognized two elderly women who clerked in Crawford's Five-and-Ten, the young boy from Harlem who shined shoes in the barber shop, the ex-refugee corned-beef-and-pastrami man of Garbitsch's Delicatessen, the bartender of Haenigsen's Grill, the one with the two sons still in Korea — wherever Ellery looked he spied familiar faces, familiar hands clutching bills of low denominations. The pressure of the crowd had burst the lock of the front door of Grooss's office and what looked like an anteroom was jammed with humanity. Even with Sergeant Velie running interference, the Queens had to claw their way into the outer office.

"Quit your shoving!"

"We were here first!"

"Who do they think they are?"

"Where," roared the Inspector over the hubbub, "is this Grooss?"

"He ain't in yet."

"He opens for business nine o'clock."

"Velie! Everybody outside."

In a few minutes the anteroom was clear and the Sergeant's mammoth back shadowed the pebbled glass of the front door from the hall. A few alarmed voices were audible, but they were soon lost in the good-natured heckling of the crowd.

A door in the side wall of the anteroom was gilt-lettered *T. F. Grooss, Private.* Ellery tried it. It was locked.

The Queens sat down on a wooden bench in the cheaply furnished anteroom, and they waited.

At 8:35 a surf-like roar from outside brought them to their feet. The next moment the corridor door flew open and a rosy-cheeked man, smiling and waving like a homecoming hero, skipped under one of Sergeant Velie's outspread arms into the anteroom. The Sergeant slammed the door and the cries of joy turned to groans.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Double-Your-Money Grooss briskly. "That man out there says you're waiting to see me on important business. What can I do for you?" As he spoke, Grooss began to pick up his morning mail, which the feet of the crowd had trampled and scattered. He was a stout, fatherly looking gentleman with a gray military mustache, a glistening bald head, a mealy voice, and the richly subdued garb of an elder statesman. "Gracious, they must have broken in again. Do you know, I've had this lock fixed twice this week?"

Inspector Queen looked unimpressed. He produced his shield and said mildly, "Inspector, police headquarters. This is Ellery Queen."

"Oh . . . yes. Some of my oldest clients are members of the Finest," said Grooss, beaming. "Thinking of investing, gentlemen?"

"Well, it's a fact, Mr. Grooss," said Ellery, "we're here to explore the subject with you . . . exhaustively."

"Ah. Certainly! If you'll give me a few minutes to go through my mail . . ." Grooss bustled to the door of his private office, fumbling with a key.

"Ten minutes," said Ellery. "No more."

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"And then," added Inspector Queen, showing his denture, "I've got a little something for *you*, Mr. Grooss." His palm touched his breast pocket, gently.

But the Wizard's cheeks did not lose their rosy color. He merely nodded, a bit absently, unlocked his office door, went in, and closed the door behind him.

"An old hand," muttered the Inspector. "It's not going to work, son."

"You never can tell," said Ellery, glancing at his watch; and he sat down and lit a cigarette. All exits from the building were now guarded by bluecoats, under orders not to let anyone leave. If Grooss lost his head . . .

Eight minutes later there was another commotion outside. Inspector Queen sprang to the corridor door and flung it open. A thin pale little man with dank brown hair and a cadaverous face screwed into an expression of chronic worry was dangling from Sergeant's Velie's fist.

"But I tell you I work here!" wailed the little man. "I'm Albert Crocker, the office assistant. Please let me in. Mr. Grooss will be mad — I'm late —"

"Let him in, Velie." The Inspector dismissed the clerk with a glance. Grooss's generosity in making money apparently did not extend to his clerk; Crocker was seedily dressed and he looked in need of a good dinner. "Grooss is in his private office, Crocker. Better get him out here."

"Is — something wrong, sir?" There was sweat on the man's upper lip.

"Tell him," said Ellery, "his time is up."

The clerk's nervousness mounted. He hurried to the door marked *Private*, opened it, and slipped into his employer's office.

"Crocker may come in handy," murmured Ellery.

"Uh-huh. We'll give him an audition. I'll bet he sings . . . What's the matter, Crocker?"

The miserable clerk was in the doorway, more worried-looking than before. "Did you say Mr. Grooss was in here, sir?"

"He's *not?*" cried the Inspector; and with a grin of triumph he pushed Crocker aside and darted into the inner office.

It was a long narrow dingy room, spartanly furnished — a flat-top desk, two wooden chairs, a few card-index drawers, a clothestree. Otherwise, the room was empty.

"We bluffed him into trying a run-out!" chortled the Inspector. "They'll grab him at one of the street exits with a suitcase full of cash —"

"Maybe not," said Ellery in a peculiar voice.

"What did you say, son?"

"If Grooss was able to get out of this room, Dad, a guarded street exit isn't necessarily going to stop him."

His father stared.

"Take a look around — a good look."

The Inspector's happiness evaporated. He saw now that there were only two exits from Grooss's private

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office: the doorway to the anteroom in which the Queens had been waiting from the moment Grooss entered his office, and the window overlooking Amsterdam Avenue seven floors below. And while the usual narrow ledge ran along outside the window, the window catch was securely fastened *on the inside.*

A single door, under observation every instant; a single window, locked on the inside. And no hiding place anywhere in the room large enough to conceal a small monkey!

"Did they say," said Inspector Queen feebly, "wizard?"

For the next eternity Ellery gave a credible imitation of a man working out an abstruse problem in Bedlam. The mob swirled all about the desk at which he sat in the inner office, shrieking for their hard-earned money and the blood of the vanished Wizard. They would have torn poor Crocker into small pieces if Sergeant Velie had not held him and made threatening gestures with his police revolver. The Sergeant kept yelling for reinforcements. At last they came — Inspector Queen and six uniformed men, looking dazed. The policemen began struggling with the people and the Inspector rammed his way to the desk and glared down at his cogitating son.

"Ellery!"

Ellery looked up. "Oh . . . . Nothing, Dad?"

"No!" snarled the Inspector. "The men swear on the memory of their mothers that they didn't let Grooss — or anyone else! — out of the building. But where is he? And how in thunder did he get out of this room?"

"Yeah, where is he?" screamed a woman's voice.

"And where's our dough?" howled a man from a bluecoat's grasp.

Ellery climbed onto the Wizard's desk. "If you'll quiet down, I'll answer all your questions!" he shouted. The mob stilled instantly. "Grooss is a smart crook. He had his getaway planned for any emergency. When he saw an inspector of police he stepped into his private office and closed that door. There are only two exits from this room, the doorway to that outer office where Inspector Queen and I were waiting for him, and the window there overlooking Amsterdam Avenue. Since we can testify that Grooss didn't leave through the outer office, he could only have left through the window. Outside the window there's a narrow ledge. He inched along—"

"Through the *window?*" muttered the Inspector. "But son, the window's locked on the inside!"

"As I say," said Ellery, "Grooss inched along the ledge to *the window of the office next door* — an office which he undoubtedly rented long ago for just such a purpose. From the next-door office, carrying his loot, he let himself out into the corridor and into the crowd. Then he must have tried to leave the building, but when he saw that police were posted at every exit and that he couldn't get out without being searched, he had to think of something else.

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"He saw right away that his big problem was to hide the money until the heat was off and he could sneak it away. Where could he hide it? Obviously, in the prepared office next door — the office he was renting, unknown to anyone, under another name. But for the money to be safe in that office, we mustn't suspect that the office had any connection with Theodore F. Grooss. How could he keep us away from there? Well, he'd got to it by way of this window . . . and at the time he climbed out of this window onto the ledge he obviously had left the window unlocked. If he could *lock* the window, he figured we'd never consider it his means of escape. So Grooss came back *here*, to his private office, locked the window on the inside —"

"Wait, wait," groaned the Inspector. "What d'ye mean he came back *here?* To do that he'd have had to pass you and me in that anteroom —"

"Exactly," said Ellery.

"But the only one who passed the two of us in the anteroom was . . . Crocker . . ."

"Yes, Crocker," said Ellery. "Crocker walked into this office from the anteroom, ostensibly to send Grooss out to us — but actually to lock the window. Crocker, my friends, is Theodore F. Grooss without the body padding, with the bald wig and mustache and the high coloring and the cotton mouth wads removed — and a quick change of clothes which he's had planted all along in the hide-away office next door —"

Ellery went on to explain that the people's money and Grooss's discarded disguise would be found in the office next door, but nobody heard him, since the Inspector had already darted through the crowd, and the crowd, with a whoop, ran after him through the anteroom into the corridor. The thin little man in Sergeant Velie's grip made a sudden vicious gesture and the Sergeant toppled, doubled up. Crocker-Grooss dashed through the anteroom pursued by Ellery's roar.

The little man stopped in the doorway, and this time there was no blood in his face at all. For the people had turned and at sight of him, as one man, they fell silent and opened their arms.

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We are deeply grateful to Fay H. Wolfson of Memphis, Tennessee, for calling our attention to a "buried treasure," a wondrous gem, in the work of that grand Old Master of the riddle story, Mark Twain. The tale below is part of Chapter II in FOLLOWING THE EQUATOR, *and we guarantee that you will relish its rediscovery . . . One important warning: The characterization of John Brown is vital to the riddle; you must accept it wholly and without question as an unchangeable condition of the story . . . Happy pondering!*

WHAT DID POOR BROWN DO?

by MARK TWAIN

WE HAD ONE GAME ABOARD SHIP which was a good time-passer — at least it was at night in the smoking-room when the men were getting freshened up from the day's monotonies and dullnesses. It was the completing of non-complete stories. That is to say, a man would tell all of a story except the finish, then the others would try to supply the ending out of their own invention. When everyone who wanted a chance had had it, the man who had introduced the story would give its original ending — then you could take your choice. Sometimes the new endings turned out to be better than the old one. But the story which called out the most persistent and determined and ambitious effort was one which *had* no ending, and so there was nothing to compare the new-made endings with. The man who told it said he could furnish the particulars up to a certain point only, because that was as much of the tale as he knew. He had read it in a volume of sketches twenty-five years ago, and was interrupted before the end was reached. He would give anyone fifty dollars who would finish the story to the satisfaction of a jury to be appointed by ourselves.

We appointed a jury and wrestled with the tale. We invented plenty of endings, but the jury voted them all down. The jury was right. It was a tale which the author of it may possibly have completed satisfactorily, and if he really had that good fortune I would like to know what the ending was. Any ordinary man will find that the story's strength is in its middle, and that there is apparently no way to transfer it to the close, where of course it ought to be. In substance the storiette was as follows:

John Brown, aged thirty-one, good, gentle, bashful, timid, lived in a quiet village in Missouri. He was superintendent of the Presbyterian Sunday

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school. It was but a humble distinction; still, it was his only official one, and he was modestly proud of it and devoted to its work and interests. The extreme kindliness of his nature was recognized by all; in fact, people said that he was made entirely out of good impulses and bashfulness; that he could always be counted upon for help when it was needed, and for bashfulness both when it was needed and when it wasn't.

Mary Taylor, twenty-three, modest, sweet, winning, and in character and person beautiful, was all in all to him. And he was very nearly all in all to her. She was wavering; his hopes were high. Her mother had been in opposition from the first. But she was wavering, too; he could see it. She was being touched by his warm interest in her two charity protégées and by his contributions toward their support. These were two forlorn and aged sisters who lived in a log hut in a lonely place up a crossroad four miles from Mrs. Taylor's farm. One of the sisters was crazy, and sometimes a little violent, but not often.

At last the time seemed ripe for a final advance, and Brown gathered his courage together and resolved to make it. He would take along a contribution of double the usual size, and win the mother over; with her opposition annulled, the rest of the conquest would be sure and prompt.

He took to the road in the middle of a placid Sunday afternoon in the soft Missourian summer, and he was equipped properly for his mission. He was clothed all in white linen, with a blue ribbon for a necktie, and he had on dressy tight boots. His horse and buggy were the finest that the livery stable could furnish. The lap-robe was of white linen, it was new, and it had a handworked border that could not be rivaled in that region for beauty and elaboration.

When he was four miles out on the lonely road and was walking his horse over a wooden bridge, his straw hat blew off and fell in the creek, and floated down and lodged against a bar. He did not quite know what to do. He must have the hat, that was manifest; but how was he to get it?

Then he had an idea. The roads were empty, nobody was stirring. Yes, he would risk it. He led the horse to the roadside and set it to cropping the grass; then he undressed and put his clothes in the buggy, petted the horse a moment to secure its compassion and its loyalty, then hurried to the stream. He swam out and soon had the hat. When he got to the top of the bank the horse and buggy were gone!

His legs almost gave way under him. The horse was walking leisurely along the road. Brown trotted after it, saying, "Whoa, whoa, there's a good fellow"; but whenever he got near enough to chance a jump for the buggy, the horse quickened its pace a little and defeated him. And so this went on, the naked man perishing with anxiety, and expecting every moment to see people come in sight. He tagged on and on, imploring the

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horse, beseeching the horse, till he had left a mile behind him, and was closing up on the Taylor premises; then at last he was successful, and got into the buggy. He flung on his shirt, his necktie, and his coat; then reached for — but he was too late; he sat suddenly down and pulled up the lap-robe, for he saw someone coming out of the gate — a woman, he thought. He wheeled the horse to the left, and struck briskly up the crossroad. It was perfectly straight, and exposed on both sides; but there were woods and a sharp turn three miles ahead, and he was very grateful when he got there. As he passed around the turn he slowed down to a walk, and reached for his tr — too late again.

He had come upon Mrs. Enderby, Mrs. Glossop, Mrs. Taylor, and Mary. They were on foot, and seemed tired and excited. They came at once to the buggy and shook hands, and all spoke at once, and said, eagerly and earnestly, how glad they were that he had come, and how fortunate it was. And Mrs. Enderby said, impressively:

"It *looks* like an accident, his coming at such a time; but let no one profane it with such a name; he was sent — sent from on high."

They were all moved, and Mrs. Glossop said in an awed voice:

"Sarah Enderby, you never said a truer word in your life. This is no accident, it is a special Providence. He *was* sent. He is an angel — an angel as truly as ever angel was — an angel of deliverance. *I* say *angel*, Sarah Enderby, and will have no other word. Don't let anyone ever say to me again that there's no such thing as special Providences; for if this isn't one, let them account for it that can."

"I *know* it's so," said Mrs. Taylor, fervently. "John Brown, I could worship you; I could go down on my knees to you. Didn't something tell you — didn't you *feel* that you were sent? I could kiss the hem of your lap-robe."

He was not able to speak; he was helpless with shame and fright. Mrs. Taylor went on:

"Why, just look at it all around, Julia Glossop. *Any* person can see the hand of Providence in it. Here at noon what do we see? We see the smoke rising. I speak up and say, 'That's the Old People's cabin re.' Didn't I, Julia Glossop?"

"The very words you said, Nancy Taylor. I was as close to you as I am now, and I heard them. You may have said hut instead of cabin, but in substance it's the same. And you were looking pale, too."

"Pale? I was that pale that if — why, you just compare it with this lap-robe. Then the next thing I said was, 'Mary Taylor, tell the hired man to rig up the team — we'll go to the rescue.' And she said, 'Mother, don't you know you told him he could drive to see his people, and stay over Sunday?' And it was just so. I declare for it, I had forgotten it. 'Then,' said I, 'we'll go afoot.' And go we did. And found Sarah on the road."

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"And we all went together," said Mrs. Enderby. "And found the cabin set fire and burnt down by the crazy one, and the poor old things so old and feeble that they couldn't go afoot. And we got them to a shady place and made them as comfortable as we could, and began to wonder which way to turn to find some way to get them conveyed to Nancy Taylor's house. And I spoke up and said — now what did I say? Didn't I say, 'Providence will provide'?"

"Why sure as you live, so you did! I had forgotten it."

"So had I," said Mrs. Glossop and Mrs. Taylor; "but you certainly *said* it. Now wasn't that remarkable?"

"Yes, I said it. And then we went to Mr. Moseley's, two miles, and all of them were gone to the camp-meeting over on Stony Fork; and then we came all the way back, two miles, and then here, another mile — and Providence *has* provided. You see it yourselves."

They gazed at each other awe-struck, and lifted their hands and said in unison:

"It's per-fectly wonderful!"

"And then," said Mrs. Glossop, "what do you think we had better do — let Mr. Brown drive the Old People to Nancy Taylor's one at a time, or put both of them in the buggy, and let him lead the horse?"

Brown gasped.

"Now, then, that's a question," said Mrs. Enderby. "You see, we are all tired out, and any way we fix it it's going to be difficult. For if Mr. Brown takes both of them, at least one of us must go back to help him, for he can't load them into the buggy by himself, and they so helpless."

"That is so," said Mrs. Taylor. "It doesn't look — oh, how would this do! — one of us drive there *with* Mr. Brown, and the rest of you go along to my house and get things ready. I'll go with him. He and I together can lift one of the Old People into the buggy; then drive her to my house and — "

"But who will take care of the other one?" said Mrs. Enderby. "We mustn't leave her there in the woods alone, you know — especially the crazy one. There and back is eight miles, you see."

They had all been sitting on the grass beside the buggy for a while, now, trying to rest their weary bodies. They fell silent a moment or two, and struggled in thought over the baffling situation; then Mrs. Enderby brightened and said:

"I think I've got the idea, now. You see, we can't *walk* any more. Think what we've done; four miles there, two to Moseley's, is six, then back to here — nine miles since noon, and not a bite to eat: I declare I don't see how we've done it; and as for me, I am just famishing. Now, somebody's got to go back, to help Mr. Brown — there's no getting around that; but whoever goes has got to ride, not walk. So my idea is this: one of us to ride back with Mr. Brown, then ride to Nancy Taylor's house with one of the Old People, leaving Mr. Brown

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to keep the other old one company, you all to go now to Nancy's and rest and wait; then one of you drive back and get the other one and drive *her* to Nancy's, and Mr. Brown walk."

"Splendid!" they all cried. "Oh, that will do — that will answer perfectly." And they all said that Mrs. Enderby had the best head for planning in the company; and they said that they wondered that they hadn't thought of this simple plan themselves. They hadn't meant to take back the compliment, good simple souls, and didn't know they had done it. After a consultation it was decided that Mrs. Enderby should drive back with Brown, she being entitled to the distinction because she had invented the plan. Everything now being satisfactorily arranged and settled, the ladies rose, relieved and happy, and brushed down their gowns, and three of them started homeward; Mrs. Enderby set her foot on the buggy step and was about to climb in, when Brown found a remnant of his voice and gasped out:

"Please, Mrs. Enderby, call them back — I am very weak; I can't walk, I can't indeed."

"Why, dear Mr. Brown! You *do* look pale; I am ashamed of myself that I didn't notice it sooner. Come back — all of you! Mr. Brown is not well. Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Brown — I'm real sorry. Are you in pain?"

"No, madam, only weak; I am not sick, but only just weak — lately; not long, but just lately."

The others came back, and poured out their sympathies and commiserations, and were full of self-reproaches for not having noticed how pale he was. And they at once struck out a new plan, and soon agreed that it was by far the best of all. They would all go to Nancy Taylor's house and see to Brown's needs first. He could lie on the sofa in the parlor, and while Mrs. Taylor and Mary took care of him the other two ladies would take the buggy and go and get one of the Old People, and leave one of themselves with the other one, and —

By this time, without any solicitation, they were at the horse's head and were beginning to turn him around. The danger was imminent, but Brown found his voice again and saved himself. He said:

"But, ladies, you are overlooking something which makes the plan impracticable. You see, if you bring *one* of them home, and one remains behind with the other, there will be three persons there when one of you comes back for that other, for someone must drive the buggy back, and *three* can't come home in it."

They all exclaimed, "Why, sure-ly, that is so!" and they were all perplexed again.

"Dear, dear, what *can* we do?" said Mrs. Glossop. "It is the most mixed-up thing that ever was. The fox and the goose and the corn and things — oh, dear, they are nothing to it."

They sat wearily down once more, to further torture their tormented heads for a plan that would work.

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Presently Mary offered a plan; it was her first effort. She said:

"I am young and strong, and am refreshed, now. Take Mr. Brown to our house, and give him help — you see how plainly he needs it. I will go back and take care of the Old People; I can be there in twenty minutes. You can go on and do what you first started to do — wait on the main road at our house until somebody comes along with a wagon; then send the wagon and bring away the three of us. You won't have to wait long; the farmers will soon be coming back from town. I will keep old Polly patient and cheered up — the crazy one doesn't need it."

This plan was discussed and accepted; it seemed the best that could be done, in the circumstances, and the Old People must be getting discouraged by this time.

Brown felt relieved, and was deeply thankful. Let him once get to the main road and he would find a way to escape.

Then Mrs. Taylor said:

"The evening chill will be coming on, pretty soon, and those poor old burnt-out things will need some kind of covering. Take the lap-robe with you, dear."

"Very well, Mother, I will."

She stepped to the buggy and put out her hand to take it —

That was the end of the tale. The passenger who told it said that when he read the story twenty-five years ago in a train he was interrupted at that point — the train jumped off a bridge.

At first we thought we could finish the story quite easily, and we set to work with confidence; but it soon began to appear that it was not a simple thing, but difficult and baffling. This was on account of Brown's character — great generosity and kindliness, but complicated with unusual shyness and diffidence, particularly in the presence of ladies. There was his love for Mary, in a hopeful state but not yet secure — just in a condition, indeed, where its affair must be handled with great tact, and no mistakes made, no offense given. And there was the mother — wavering, half-willing — by adroit and flawless diplomacy to be won over, now, or perhaps never at all. Also, there were the helpless Old People yonder in the woods waiting — their fate and Brown's happiness to be determined by what Brown should do within the next two seconds. Mary was reaching for the lap-robe; Brown must decide — there was no time to be lost.

Of course, none but a happy ending of the story would be accepted by the jury; the finish must find Brown in high credit with the ladies, his behavior without blemish, his modesty unwounded, his character for self-sacrifice maintained, the Old People rescued through him, their benefactor, all the party proud of him, happy in him, his praises on all their tongues.

We tried to arrange this, but it was beset with persistent and irreconcil-

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able difficulties. We saw that Brown's shyness would not allow him to give up the lap-robe. This would offend Mary and her mother; and it would surprise the other ladies, partly because this stinginess toward the suffering Old People would be out of character with Brown, and partly because he was a special Providence and could not properly act so. If asked to explain his conduct, his shyness would not allow him to tell the truth, and lack of invention and practice would find him incapable of contriving a lie that would wash. We worked at the troublesome problem until three in the morning without any success.

Meantime Mary was still reaching for the lap-robe. We gave it up, and decided to let her continue to reach. It is the reader's privilege to determine for himself how the thing came out.

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THE INVESTIGATIONS OF INSPECTOR APPLEBY

A VERY ODD CASE INDEED

by MICHAEL INNES

"JEWELRY?" INSPECTOR APPLEBY said. "It's certainly queer stuff, and causes endless trouble. Lady Darcy's emeralds, for instance — I've told you about them. A strange affair, decidedly. But nothing to Mrs. Denton and her diamonds."

"Have you a memento of that in your museum too?" I asked.

"I'm glad to say I have — and I'll show it to you presently." Appleby paused meditatively. "Yes — a very odd case indeed. And, you know, she seemed a decent enough sort of woman. But asking for trouble —"

"Mrs. Denton?" Recollection came to me. "Did you say *decent?*"

"Well, well — the word can be applied in various ways." Appleby was wisely tolerant. "Put it that she seemed not a bad sort. But of course she had enjoyed a rather startling career, and everybody knew of the way in which her enormous wealth had come to her. It made the thing additionally awkward. For a time her situation really did look quite black. And principally — this was the curious part — because of the obstinate way in which she clung to a thoroughly damaging story."

I shook my head. "My dear Appleby, you talk in riddles. Be a good fellow, and begin at the beginning."

"Then here goes." Appleby considered for a moment, then went on. "I may begin by mentioning certain of the ways in which the good lady was, as I've said, asking for trouble. The diamonds constituted an elaborate rig-out and their intrinsic value was very high. Mrs. Denton made no secret of the fact that she always took them about with her. Moreover, just as if she was positively anxious to advertise the fact, she had lately had a new traveling case made for them — an obtrusive and expensive-looking pigskin affair which she would carry like a large handbag. That alone was asking for pretty well anything — murder not barred.

"Then again, Mrs. Denton quite often went abroad — and on these occasions too the diamonds went with her. There was trouble in that — although only of an official, humdrum kind. Exchange restrictions, you know, have meant that valuable things of that sort have to be checked in and out of the country at the Customs barrier. Otherwise, there would always be some wealthy people prepared to buy jewelry in England, take it abroad, sell it, and have a nice expensive time on the proceeds before

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returning home. So Mrs. Denton had to show her diamonds whenever she came and went."

"Did she move," I asked, "in good society?"

"My dear fellow, that is something of which we all have our own definition. Many of her acquaintances had titles and estates, and it is conceivable that a few even had ancestors. But Mrs. Denton was not exactly a snob. She stuck by some old friends — or had some old friends stick by her. Did you ever hear of Maurice the Great?"

"I think not."

"You scarcely surprise me. He was a rather low-class conjurer in Marseilles, with whom Mrs. Denton's passionate interest in human nature — particularly masculine human nature — had prompted her to a brief but warm friendship. When Maurice hanged himself — he couldn't quite stand the pace — Mrs. Denton took on his destitute widow as her maid. It must be called a charitable act."

"No doubt. But surely, Appleby, eccentricity of that sort —"

"Quite so. Mrs. Denton was very vulnerable to the world's censure once any spotlight fell on her."

Again Appleby paused as if to marshal his facts. "Behold, then, Mrs. Denton, attended by the widow of her deceased illusionist, presenting herself before the Customs officials at Dover on her return from a trip to Paris. They knew her very well. And, as a necessary consequence of that, they knew the diamonds very well too. All too well, as it turned out. For when Mrs. Denton opened that opulent pigskin receptacle and displayed her treasure, the fellow whose duty it was to check them off found himself obscurely puzzled. He missed, I suppose, in some minute but just perceptible degree, the usual knock-you-down effect."

"I believe I've got it! What he saw were not the true diamonds at all, but mere paste."

"How acute you are. But, of course, this wasn't what Mrs. Denton was taxed with there and then. There were delays, consultations, and so forth; and she was questioned so closely that she was reduced to tears. Yet she clung to what, as I have already said, was a most damaging story — although she appeared too confused herself to see it as that. She had lately met a certain M. Busson, a man of high character who was one of the foremost authorities on precious stones in France. He had called on her at her hotel in Paris that very morning, inspected the diamonds, and seen Mrs. Denton lock them away for their journey. Since then, she declared, the case had never been out of her sight, nor its key out of her pocket."

"And how did this end?"

"It ended — for the moment — with the questionable gems being impounded for further examination; and with Mrs. Denton departing by a late, slow train for London. She put on quite an act — staggering out, weeping into a few square centimetres

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of scented handkerchief, and with her maid — whose name was Annette — following behind with the luggage, including the despoiled and forlorn jewel case."

"And then there were legal proceedings?"

Appleby shook his head. "No, there was only the threat of them. The official world is very cautious, and making out a criminal case against Mrs. Denton would have been tricky. But it was concluded that she had certainly disposed of her diamonds in order to build up a substantial fund abroad. Recovering them was decidedly up to her. She was smoothly informed that the true diamonds must be produced for inspection."

"And how, Appleby, did you come into this?"

"A week later Mrs. Denton appeared at the Yard — and with a queer tale. She had received an anonymous letter, offering to restore the diamonds to her — but at their full market value. There were precise instructions about how to proceed. It struck me that, if her story was true, she had shown considerable strength of mind in resisting the proposal. So I took up the affair myself. It didn't really take much solving.

"As you know, it is difficult to dispose of stolen jewels for anything like their true value. So here was an ingenious combination of theft and blackmail. Mrs. Denton's diamonds had been stolen — and she herself had been maneuvered into what looked like a criminal deception. She *had* to have her jewels back, poor woman, or go to jail. It pretty well came to that.

"How was it done? Come and see." Appleby led the way down the room to his little collection of criminological exhibits. "After Mrs. Denton had that new jewel case made, Annette went to some of her deceased husband's old associates in the conjuring business and had a simple trick replica manufactured. Here it is."

I stared in astonishment at the handsome affair held out to me. "You mean to say —"

"Certainly. It is perfectly simple, and does a neat little swallowing trick. Put in X. Shut the case. Open it again. What you find is Y — while X is snugly tucked away in a false lid. It never occurred to the Customs people to be interested in the receptacle itself! Their attention was given to what they had opened it on — the contents. So when they had impounded the false diamonds and the bewildered Mrs. Denton had handed this case to Annette as worthless, the real diamonds were still concealed in it, and Annette was able to take possession of them at her leisure. One can forgive her the pleasure she must have taken in the fraud. Her husband, you remember —"

"Quite so. And what a queer story." I took the pigskin exhibit rather cautiously in my hands. "I can —?"

"Examine it, my dear fellow? Certainly. You'll find it — as I said at the start — a very odd case indeed."

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THE MAN WHO MADE PEOPLE MAD

by MARK VAN DOREN

THE TWO STATE TROOPERS STARED at what was left of the phaeton. Splinters of it lay everywhere along the shoulder of the road. Shreds of the shiny black top under which Old Goodwin used to ride so proudly hung down from nearby weeds and bushes. The three bright-blue wheels that hadn't come off were collapsed into crazy shapes, their spokes and felloes broken and bent yet somehow holding on to one another. The wheel that had come off — and had caused the accident — leaned against a big rock to which it had rolled. It was the one undamaged thing in sight — the one part of the buggy that hadn't died with its driver.

"What makes you say it wasn't an accident?" The older trooper, Elkhart, clearly didn't believe the lugubrious fellow who had been sent for and who now stood between him and Worth, looking down as they did at the wreck.

"Why, looky there," he said, and pointed. "That wheel. Come off, it did, a couple a minutes after he started home."

"So everybody tells me," Elkhart said. "And I can see for myself. But why do you think it was more than a piece of bad luck for Mr. Goodwin? Or carelessness — if not his, yours. When did you last grease this thing?"

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By "thing" he meant the only survivor there had been, until an hour ago, of bygone days in Beersheba. And now that was gone. So was the dapper old gentleman who boasted both of its age and of his own; and so for all practical purposes was the gray team that had run wildly home, pieces of harness whipping at its flanks, and notified Bart Hines that something serious was the matter. He was leaving to investigate, he said, when the summons from the troopers reached him. So here he was, long-faced, dim-eyed; and he didn't seem bothered a bit by Elkhart's question.

"Why, yestiddy. I greased it every week, and yestiddy was the day, so I greased it. But I seen to it all the wheels was on good, and the nuts turned tight. Wasn't no carelessness that way."

Worth looked at him sharply. "All *four* wheels?"

"Yep."

"How can you be so sure?" Elkhart signaled to Worth that he was not to put the questions. "Remember counting?"

"Nope. But Mr. Goodwin did. He always did. He went around and counted — up to four, he did. And then he put the wrench in that there box, that little box I made for him. The wrench had to go wherever he did, right here — looky — under the seat. If it was in there now I'd show you. But it ain't. Wrench is gone. Top's all shut nice, but the wrench — somebody took it."

Elkhart stooped faster than Worth did and slid back the newly painted lid of a narrow container for tools that by chance had not been torn from its place. There was nothing in it.

"But the wrench was here?" Elkhart squinted up at Bart.

"It always was. He wouldn't go nowheres without it was under him like that. Somebody took it."

"Stole it, you mean?"

"Nope."

Elkhart straightened up. "Look here, what *do* you mean?"

"Took it. Turned the nut off with it, then they took it, so as — well, I don't know why they took it, but they did. Somebody's got it now. And where's the nut?"

Elkhart glanced at Worth, who had searched and failed to find it — the big square nut that only an old-fashioned buggy wrench would fit. Elkhart, old enough to remember the size and shape of such an object, had described it carefully; but Worth was sure it was nowhere among the highway weeds.

Bart seemed to read their minds. "You looked along here for it? So did I, what time I had. It never *come* off nohow. Was *took* off — up there. Somebody aimed to kill him."

He rolled his eyes up the gravelly bank at the top of which a small crowd stood motionless, listening. They were country people, all of them, dressed in their best for the Beersheba Fair where old Silas Goodwin had also been. The fair was over

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in every sense: a few farmers were up in the grove, doubtless, preparing to lead their animals home; and the concession booths were being knocked apart — the sound of hammers came faintly through the warm, late August afternoon. But even at an earlier hour, Elkhart thought, the death of this old man would have stopped the show.

"Kill him!" Elkhart lowered his voice and hoped that Hines would do so too. Perhaps the crowd ought to be sent away. "Kill him! What makes you say that? Why would anybody —"

"Plenty a people never liked Old Silas. Plenty of 'em up there, now. You ask around. You'll see."

"Ask who? Everybody?" Worth smiled at this.

"Anybody that'll talk. Some won't though. Some won't say a word."

"You've said a few." Elkhart studied him.

"You sent for me to come, and so I come."

"That's right."

"Where's *he?* Where's Mr. Goodwin?"

"He was taken into Marlboro."

"Marlboro."

"Yes. Now you go home and stay there. We'll have some things to ask you about later. Don't go away."

"Where'd I go? But don't ask me. Ask them." He gestured up the slope again.

Elkhart wondered if the crowd had heard too much. In any case it must be scattered; he would send Worth to do this. Meanwhile, who in Beersheba could tell him anything? Who of those up there, even? They still stared at him, motionless, like children watching fireworks. There was just a chance that Bartleby Hines meant one of them, and knew which one he meant.

Back in Marlboro that night, with Lieutenant Radin giving none too kind an ear to him and Worth as they reported the case, Elkhart could not feel certain that it *was* a case.

"People like that — like the hired man you describe — will tell you anything," said the lieutenant, swinging his chair to the desk again and straightening some papers there that had his real attention. "With or without reason," he added as he reread the top letter. Then, rather absently: "Did you consider *him?* Why was the idea so definite in his mind? — *if*, mind. You say he was almost obsessed with it. Well?" There was a moment's silence in the room. "Such people sometimes hang themselves. As if they had to. Even wanted to."

"No, sir," said Elkhart. "I thought of it" — Worth wondered if he had — "but it's impossible. By all reports the old man was good to Hines — paid him well — and anyway, Hines bragged of his responsibility. The horses, I mean, and the old-fashioned rig. There was nothing like it in the county; people talked of it a lot, and he was proud. So was Goodwin, of course; they tell me he drove like a duke or something — 'a little old

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dandy of a duke,' the schoolteacher actually said. He flourished his whip before he cracked it, and he sat there, for all of his age, as straight and spruce as you please. Did you ever see him?"

"No," said the lieutenant. "No, I never did."

"He was very small, with white whiskers that divided and curled up on both sides. He was neat and clean, so that you would have thought his old wife took special care of him. But he had no wife; never did have one. A bachelor all his life, and probably a gay one once, though there seem to be no stories about it, at least that anyone remembers. He always lived alone — latterly with Hines, of course, who was just as vain as he was, if not more so, as sometimes happens with such people."

The lieutenant, who did or did not notice the "such people," looked up from his letter. "The schoolteacher," he remarked. "A woman, I take it. Did *she* dislike him? According to Hines, you say, the little duke was generally disliked. Is she old? The gay bachelor, you know. Anything in that?"

"Oh, no," said Elkhart. "A young woman — Miss Denton — and chiefly she was amused. But she isn't by his death. Nobody is, so far as I can see. Or glad of it — nothing like that."

"They wouldn't dance in the street." The lieutenant reached for another letter. "What about this dislike of Goodwin? Why was that? Money? Did he hold mortgages? Was he a banker once? Did he rob the poor? Or the rich? But there are no rich people in Beersheba."

"No," said Elkhart, "no reason like any of those. He never did much of anything. He inherited his farm, a small but good one on the south side of the village, sixty years ago, the storekeeper tells me. His father worked hard and got it into good shape; but he died young, and so did his wife. There were no brothers and sisters. Silas simply kept the place going — with help. He hardly ever worked himself. He liked to drive around. He drove around forever, until today."

"The storekeeper. *He* old?" The lieutenant yawned.

"Oh, yes. Arlington Bass. About the same age, I gather. But he had little to say — except, of course, that he was sorry."

"Hm." The lieutenant looked at the clock. It said 10:30, and he got up to go. "Forget it, Elkhart. Let's forget it. The coroner is satisfied it was an act of God, and I must say that's good enough for me. Worth, you're on duty here tonight."

"Yes, sir." The youngest of the three men looked as if he wanted to speak, but in the face of Radin's extreme indifference he hesitated.

"Worth," said Elkhart, not without condescension, "has another angle. He interviewed the crowd that was at the fair with Goodwin, and he says he picked up a few items. I don't know what they add up to, but he thinks he does."

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The lieutenant, buttoning his coat, said tolerantly: "Well?" Perhaps he didn't approve of the condescension.

"At least," said Worth, "I heard from several of them why the old guy was unpopular. He talked too much."

The lieutenant laughed. "A gossip. With whiskers."

"Not exactly, sir. That is, he didn't talk behind their backs. It was what he said *to* them that made them mad. Or sometimes it did. He was a bright old beaver, and sarcastic. He would say anything he thought, and he thought plenty. He was pretty superior, in his own opinion, and he didn't care whose feelings he hurt. He thought he was privileged. *They* thought he didn't like *them.*"

The lieutenant laughed again. "And so they killed him, eh? Sounds unnecessary. Sounds excessive."

Worth nodded. "Still," he said, "I picked up half a dozen cracks he made today, and maybe they do add up to something. Any one of them could have made somebody mad enough — I don't say to —"

"That's right," said the lieutenant. "Don't. But what were they? Did you keep a list?"

"Yes, sir." Worth had the paper in his hand. "He kidded Bass the storekeeper for coming to the fair without a coat or tie. Old Goodwin was a dresser himself — fancy waistcoats, and all that — and he pretended he thought Arlington, who is fat, had escaped from one of the exhibition pens. Old Arlington didn't enjoy it. Several people told me so. Then Martin Hay, the Justice of the Peace — Goodwin jumped on him about a settlement he made a number of years ago between two farmers, neighbors of his, who were disputing about a line. He asked Hay if it wasn't true that one of them bribed him to run the line where he wanted it. He asked him the same question every year, right out in public — so, this year too; this afternoon. He bowed to an old maid, Miss Eva Groom, who was separated in the crowd from her sister Louise, and said out loud, so everybody around could hear: 'You're not the pretty one, are you, dear?' It seems that Louise Groom was good-looking once, in a mousy way — a quiet little thing — and Eva doesn't like to be reminded that she never was."

"*They* old?" The lieutenant didn't yawn.

Worth considered. Radin was 44 and Elkhart was 40. "Not very. Half Goodwin's age, at a guess. They live together in Under Mountain, and people don't see them often. But they came to the fair; and Louise wasn't so lost in the crowd that she didn't overhear. She turned red and ran away. Eva, they say, looked as if she could poison the old pup. But she didn't answer him; and when she found Louise a little later, the two of them went home."

"Did you talk to the sisters?"

"Oh, no. Mrs. Fred Marsh told me all this. She *is* old; she knew the parents of 'the girls.' They live down the Under Mountain road. Eva is tall

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and plain, with one bad eye. A good girl, says Mrs. Marsh, but has a temper." And when the lieutenant glanced at the paper in Worth's hand, the youngest trooper went on. "Goodwin — let's see — asked Henry Oldfield about the burning of his corn crib recently; seemed to suggest Oldfield had set the fire to collect two thousand dollars' insurance. Then the Whitman brothers came along — Saul and Clarence. They are the only Whitmans left on a big rundown farm at the far end of Under Mountain. Several older brothers have gone to the city and got rich, more or less; but these two have never married and they don't ever open the shutters any more except at the kitchen windows. Saul does the washing and Clarence is the cook. Of course they keep cows and sell milk, and so they do farm a little; but no more than they have to. They are quiet and clean, and seldom seen except on Friday nights when they milk early and drive to Becket — not to Marlboro — in a battered blue Chevvy whose windows they never run down. They don't seem to like fresh air, or any kind of weather. They've been seen driving their cows up in the rain, each of them carrying an umbrella. Well, Goodwin's point of course was what they do in Becket on Friday nights. It seems there are some houses there —"

"You know there are."

"In line of duty, yes." Worth frowned, then smiled. "Lastly, lieutenant, there was the druggist, Sol Stone. He made a mistake in a prescription once."

"Too bad, too bad." The lieutenant, straightening his hat, was at the door. "Gentlemen, I couldn't be less excited than you have made me. But we can sleep on all of this — except you, Worth — and see what we think in the morning. I can't believe they deserve it, but both of you will check these locals tomorrow. Go together, and make sure. My own opinion is that Hines was giving you a runaround. But check him too, and look for that wrench. A kid could have opened the toolbox, played with what he found, and dropped it not too far away. Still, if it *isn't* there —"

He waved and left them.

It was half-past 11 before the two troopers turned their car into the Under Mountain road. The morning had been uneventful, as Elkhart made it plain he thought it would be. All they had stirred up in Beersheba was curiosity — people running out of stores to see where they were bound for next, and standing in small groups after they had passed. Arlington Bass, Martin Hay, Henry Oldfield, Sol Stone — nothing in any of them, said Elkhart as they left the pavement and went slowly over a narrow gravel track that descended the lonesome valley of granite and sparse grass; nothing to get excited about or even to enter in the record.

Each of the four had been amazed to see them — dumfounded, actually, and in Oldfield's case embarrassed;

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but beyond admitting that Goodwin had spoken of them as reported, they had nothing to reveal. It seemed clear that they were used to it, and supposed everybody else was; Goodwin was an old fool, said Martin Hay — nobody paid much attention to him. Yes, he made people mad, but not *that* mad. Worth had looked sharply at him then, for neither Elkhart nor himself had mentioned the possibility of murder; but it seemed he meant, mad enough to be glad that Goodwin was dead.

"What a hell of a road," said Elkhart, "and what a God-forsaken hole in the eternal hills. No wonder that Chevvy is — what did you call it? — battered. Do the Groom girls have a car?"

"Yes," said Worth, "a Dodge. About the same age, Mrs. Marsh told me yesterday. Eva drives it." He was thinking. "The Whitmans and the Grooms. You know, they weren't connected in my mind till Mrs. Marsh hinted they were in hers — and maybe in theirs. Did you make anything of her notion that Saul and Clarence never had married because neither one of them could get Louise?"

"And what has that to do with what?"

"Don't know." Worth, at the wheel, continued to think. "The Grooms come first — there, that's their house — but let's go on to the other place and see the women on the way out. We have to come back anyway. It's a dead end, smack into Smith Mountain." Worth leaned forward to see the overhanging summit of a mass that was almost wholly rock, with a few tall spruces part way down its nearer side.

There was not a sign of life at the Grooms', unless it was true that a curtain in one of the front windows moved a little as they passed. One of the sisters watching them, and wondering?

Neither spoke of this; and then they were at the Whitmans'. A large house, unpainted, full of a live family once, but now with its eyes closed as if forever, awaiting the end.

"They keep it neat at that," said Worth as he turned the ignition off. A grass walk down to the barn was bordered with poppies and ageratum. Through the barn door they could see the tails of two fat horses, switching flies. A wagon loaded with hay waited at one end for the pulley to come down and jerk its contents up into the mow. The horses would supply the power. There was no tractor, obviously — nothing modern anywhere.

"They're eating lunch," said Worth. "Or dinner, they would say. Let's try the kitchen door."

One of the brothers, hollow-cheeked and rather handsome, opened the screen for them without a word. He evidently had seen them come and was waiting. The other one, at the stove, was lifting boiled potatoes out of a pot; he did not turn at once, but when he did, coming to the table with the hot dish in his hands, they saw that he was handsome too: a copy of his brother, yet leaner still, very shy,

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and half bald. The first one still had all his dark hair.

"Sorry to interrupt your meal," said Worth. They stared at him, not with ill will, and quietly sat down to eat. No suggestion that the potatoes and fried meat be shared; no invitation to sit down themselves. "Which one of you is Saul Whitman?"

"That's me," said the man who had let them in. He divided a potato exactly in two and reached for the butter dish. "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" Worth smiled. "Nothing, necessarily. We're from Marlboro Barracks" — Saul nodded as if he knew — "and we're calling on all the people who talked to Silas Goodwin yesterday, before the accident."

Neither of the Whitman brothers looked up. But Saul said: "We didn't talk to Silas Goodwin."

"He talked to you, though."

Saul put down his fork. "Yes, he did." Clarence continued eating. "He talked to almost everybody. He always did. Too bad about the accident."

"Was it anything particular he said? Anything you maybe didn't like?"

Saul took up his fork again. "Who talked to *you*? Who's been saying what he said?"

"I forget."

"That so! Well, *I* forget. It wasn't much of anything."

Worth thought twice. Then: "Something about Friday nights?"

He might have thought a third time for all the response he got, though it seemed to him that each of the brothers stiffened a little, as if listening for the other to speak. Also, there was the suggestion of a flush in both their foreheads.

Finally Saul said: "We shop in Becket. Get our week's supplies."

"I do remember," said Worth irrelevantly, "who told me what he asked Miss Eva Groom. Mrs. Marsh told me. Did you hear it? Were you in the crowd — either of you?"

Now there was a response, this time from Clarence. He stood up suddenly, his neck and face fiery red, and shouted: "Mrs. Marsh! She's an old fool! And so was Silas Goodwin, for that matter! So's the whole town!"

"Clarence," said Saul, "you better sit down and eat your dinner."

But Clarence refused. "Whose business is it anyway? What's all this about?" He didn't look at either state trooper, and so was startled when Elkhart said:

"You're excited."

"Yes, I am!" He now gave Elkhart all his attention. "Yes, I am! What's this about? Whose business is it what who said to who?"

"Sit down, Clarence." Saul looked at him. "Eat your dinner."

"Why," said Elkhart, "don't you know? Someone thinks Mr. Goodwin's death wasn't exactly an accident. Someone says that wheel was meant to come off when it did."

"Bart Hines." Clarence said it quietly.

"You mean," Elkhart ventured, "*he* meant it to come off?"

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Both brothers turned their faces full upon him, amazement in every feature. "Golly, no!" Saul even laughed. "But he's the kind could think it of somebody else. Could say so, too. He didn't say a *name*, though, did he?" And when Elkhart remained silent Saul insisted: "*Did* he?"

"No," said Elkhart. And the two relaxed. "No, he didn't. So we have to see for ourselves. We're going now to your neighbors — the Grooms — and then we're finished."

Clarence sat down as suddenly as he had stood up. He stared at his plate, the anger all gone out of him. "Grooms," he said. "Those girls — you wouldn't go there, would you? You wouldn't pester *them!*" It was pity now, not rage. "They never hurt a fly."

"Not even the one that Goodwin — couldn't *she* be mad? You heard, I guess," said Elkhart.

"We both did," answered Saul. "He was the devil himself when he said that. In front of everybody, too. But why go and remind her of it? That's what Clarence means. Why bother *them?* You don't think" — and he stopped abruptly, staring at his plate as Clarence did.

Elkhart signaled to Worth. "We don't think anything. We only ask questions. Thank you, gentlemen. Good day."

They left the brothers silent in their chairs; nor did the two troopers speak to each other until Worth had turned the car about and headed it toward Beersheba, Smith Mountain grimmer than ever behind their backs.

"Well, my boy, what do you conclude?" Elkhart was tolerant, paternal. "So far, what do we know?"

"Nothing, I suppose." Worth slowed down for a deep hole in the gravel. "But there's one more call to make."

"There *is*?" Elkhart chuckled. "They didn't shame you out of it?"

"They almost did, with plenty of help from myself. Yes, I'm a heel, but I'm going there. You can wait outside if you want to."

"No, I'm curious too."

"Curious?"

"Not much more. I'd hardly call it business any longer."

"You noticed, of course," said Worth, "their minds were on both women. Don't pester *them*. Don't bother *them* — they kept saying that. All four of them are — well —"

"Good friends?"

"Much more, I'd say. They're very close. A wonder they never moved in together."

"Except that both boys couldn't have Louise. Remember Mrs. Marsh?"

"She wouldn't know everything."

"You think you will?"

"Certainly not, sir. . . . Well, here we are."

Their apologies, delivered at the door, had been accepted by Miss Eva. But now in the low, dark front room where she had asked them to sit down, her restlessness, far from disappearing, increased with every effort Worth made to reassure her.

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Her hands, clasping and unclasping in her lap, told each of the troopers more than anything else about her did, though Worth said over and over to himself that Mrs. Marsh had exaggerated her plainness. She was tall, and indefinably awkward; but she was gentle, and if one of her eyes was "bad" (the old woman's word) Worth couldn't make up his mind which one it was. If either was, he thought, it accounted for a certain wildness in her gaze as it went from one man to the other, then sought the ceiling, then escaped in desperation out of the window where the only visible thing was a great maple tree, its leaves perfectly still, that stood between the house and the road.

She was very pale, and she was trying to keep her eyes at rest, and failing; but she was succeeding too well at another effort — to keep her voice low — for Worth had to lean forward now and then so that he could hear how she answered him.

She was in torment. Why? He wished he hadn't come; he wished Elkhart had stayed in the car; he wished anything but this. And still he had to go on with it, for there was something he must understand.

"You say, Miss Groom, your sister positively will not talk to us?"

She breathed it rather than said it: "No — no — she never will."

"Or see us, even? Or let us see her?"

Again the terrified, the almost inaudible: "No — no!"

"And she's not ill?"

"No!" But this was not whispered. It was cried — so piercingly that Worth, startled, stood up as she did. Elkhart, as if paralyzed, sat watching them both.

"No!" And now both hands were over her face. "If that could only be! Get Saul! Get Clarence! I saw you go down there — why didn't you bring them back with you? Bring them, bring them! I can't stand it any longer. Bring Saul and Clarence right away!"

She dropped her hands and started walking toward the closed door of the room — she had pulled it to, softly, when they came in — then back again to where Worth stared at her, noting the ravaged eyes, the twitching lips. "Don't you see?" She begged him. "Don't you see?"

"The Whitmans," said Worth. He sounded feeble to himself. "They told us not to come here. They said —"

"What did *they* know? But they *will* know. *Every*body will know. Don't you see? Don't you see?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Groom, but I *don't* see. Maybe *he* does," — and he turned to Elkhart who only said, as he got up from his chair: "I'll go for the Whitmans."

Suddenly Worth was alone with Eva, who had opened the door for Elkhart, watched him out the front way, then pulled it shut again, softly, almost secretly, behind her. Now she leaned back against it.

"Don't you see?" She was whispering once more. "*Louise is dead.*"

"What! Your sister —"

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"Listen. I'll tell you; and you tell them. She did it — Louise did it!"

"Your sister!" Worth stared at the door as if it were something he could see through. But Eva, protectively there, prevented this, and talked so rapidly that he knew it was a relief for her to let somebody know at last.

"She did it, and then she did this — took all the sleeping medicine — got up after I went to bed and took all of it, every drop. I thought she was feeling better in her mind. I said she didn't mean to *kill* him — only to take him down a little; the wheel would come off and there he'd be sitting like an old duck out of water, and people noticing and laughing, though one or two would come to help him up, and he wouldn't like that either. When she told me after supper what she did, and carried on so that I knew she'd be sick if she didn't stop, I said she didn't *mean* to kill him, and she said maybe that was true, but it made no difference, because he did die, didn't he, and so she killed him. I kept on, though, with what I wanted to believe, and did believe, and still do — I kept on putting it the other way, and it seemed to me she felt a great deal better in her mind, so that she took a cup of tea and went to sleep — at least she shut her eyes. I said, as long as she hadn't *meant* to kill him, why, she didn't need to *tell*. It looked like an accident, everybody supposed it was, and so nobody would ever know. When she didn't get up early this morning I let her be a while, I didn't want her to wake up and go over everything again. I got breakfast for both of us, and then I called her — oh, oh, my!"

Worth watched her carefully as she covered her face again and stood there, shaking. But she could stand it; could stand more of it, he thought; wanted to say much, much more; as presently, dropping her hands, she did.

"You're wondering why it was — I know. You thought, if anybody minded what he said to me, *I'd* be the one. But she cared most. Listen! Are they coming back?" Her eyes went to the window. But of course it wasn't time yet for Elkhart to return with Saul and Clarence.

"She cared because of them. Saul was going to marry her — he really was — and Clarence was going to marry me — he didn't use to want to, but he said last week he would — and then what did old Goodwin do yesterday but remind him, and before people, too, of the reason he had waited and waited? Louise was the pretty one. Both boys —"

She couldn't go on.

Nor could Worth say one sensible word.

But after a few moments she did go on. "She cared the most. Louise and Saul both did — both always had. But we were that close, Louise and me, she wouldn't dream of marrying unless I did. And the same with Saul — he never could be different from Clarence, no matter what he missed. Then Clarence changed. I don't know why, but he did. We were

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just friends, and then he talked — *they* talked — we all talked of moving in together on their place. Louise was so *happy*, Mr. Worth, it made me happy too; except that both of us were afraid Clarence would change back again. But he didn't. And then yesterday she thought he might — she even told herself he *had* — and so she did that thing before she knew. I told her she never meant to *kill* him. And now everybody will know. I saw you go down there, and I said to myself there was no chance of it being kept secret any more. You'd get it out of me, you would; and so you have. I was going to tell people she took the sleeping medicine by mistake — an accident, I'd say. And now you know it wasn't. Oh, my! When *will* they come? Yet I don't want to see them either. And yet I do. Saul will be the worst — no matter why, Louise is gone. Oh, *my!* What'll I do? What'll *they* do? Listen! Are they coming?"

There was the far sound of two cars on the road, with Smith Mountain behind, multiplying the sound.

Worth listened without taking his eyes from Eva, who now had slumped halfway to the floor and would surely fall unless he got her somehow into the nearest chair.

"Miss Groom," he said. "Miss Groom." She couldn't lift her head to look at him. She tried, however, as she whispered:

"You want to see her? Maybe you don't believe me."

"I believe you," he said. "And I am very sorry. I believe — Miss Groom, do you hear me? — I believe your sister didn't mean it. Do you hear me, Miss Groom?"

Seconds passed, and then she nodded. Her smooth brown head, with only the least gray in it, nodded without turning up.

"And that is what *you* believe. You do understand?"

She nodded again, almost imperceptibly.

"Silas Goodwin yesterday, your sister last night — two accidents, Miss Groom."

The cars stopped outside, and three silent men came toward the house.

Note:

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Another complete crime story on one page!

KILLERS THREE: (3) *First Time Machine*

by FREDRIC BROWN

DR. GRAINGER SAID SOLEMNLY, "Gentlemen, the first time machine."

His three friends stared at it.

It was a box about six inches square, with dials and a switch.

"You need only to hold it in your hand," said Dr. Grainger, "set the dials for the date you want, press the button — and you are there."

Smedley, one of the doctor's three friends, reached for the box, held it and studied it. "Does it really work?"

"I tested it briefly," said the doctor. "I set it one day back and pushed the button. Saw myself — my own back — just walking out of the room. Gave me a bit of a turn."

"What would have happened if you'd rushed to the door and kicked yourself in the seat of the pants?"

Dr. Grainger laughed. "Maybe I couldn't have — because it would have changed the past. That's the old paradox of time travel, you know. What would happen if one went back in time and killed one's own grandfather before he met one's grandmother?"

Smedley, the box still in his hand, suddenly was backing away from the three other men. He grinned at them. "That," he said, "is just what I'm going to do. I've been setting the date dials sixty years back while you've been talking."

"Smedley! Don't!" Dr. Grainger started forward.

"Stop, Doc. Or I'll press the button now. Otherwise I'll explain to you." Grainger stopped. "I've heard of that paradox too. And it's always interested me because I knew I *would* kill my grandfather if I ever had a chance to. I hated him. He was a cruel bully, made life a hell for my grandmother and my parents. So this is a chance I've been waiting for."

Smedley's hand reached for the button and pressed it.

There was a sudden blur . . . Smedley was standing in a field. It took him only a moment to orient himself. If this spot was where Dr. Grainger's house would some day be built, then his great-grandfather's farm would be only a mile south. He started walking. En route he found a piece of wood that made a fine club.

Near the farm, he saw a red-headed young man beating a dog with a whip.

"Stop that!" Smedley yelled, rushing up.

"Mind your own damn business," said the young man as he lashed with the whip again.

Smedley swung the club.

Sixty years later, Dr. Grainger said solemnly, "Gentlemen, the first time machine."

His two friends stared at it.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

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A KIND OF MISFORTUNE *by RICHARD PARKER* (SCRIBNER'S, $2.75)	"Entertainment content high, but profusion of characters is mild nuisance." (SC)	"If you enjoy murder stories in the lively, British manner . . ." (FC)
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VANISHED *by MARJORIE CARLETON* (MORROW, $2.75)	"Get out your disbelief-suspenders and have fun." (AB)	". . . original plot and well written, but the people are . . . cold fish . . ." (AdV)
SUDDEN SQUALL *by JEANNETTE COVERT NOLAN* (IVES WASHBURN, $2.75)	". . . none too sharply clued nor profoundly characterized, but skillfully . . . told . . ." (AB)	"Self-respecting, nicely put together, nothing very new but pleasant enough reading." (LGO)

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
FP: *Fay Profilet in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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DEAD PIGEON

by JULES ARCHER

DOBERMAN'S MOUTH WAS DRY AS he locked the brief-case. Feeling his hands shake, he fumbled in his pocket for cigarettes. He stared down through the window at the new greenery of Central Park. Some of the tension went out of him as he lit up and inhaled. Then his tired blue eyes fell, fascinated, to the brief-case into which he had packed his destiny.

He had made the decision, yet he was not wholly reconciled to it. He knew that in another moment he would walk calmly away from his office forever, the brief-case tight in his moist hand. But it was so startling a break from the pattern of his 54 years that he could not quite believe it. He took the plane ticket from his pocket and studied it incredulously.

The office was quiet in the vacuum of Saturday afternoon. Doberman's eyes wandered slowly from the broad desk to the red leather couch, then through the doorway to the outer office. It was not easy to leave so much of his life behind.

His gaze lingered briefly on the roses on Miss Wilder's desk. She would crash with the others, and her beloved roses would be swept into the debris. It wasn't fair, it wasn't kind. But self-preservation was the first law of the jungle. Even roses were equipped with piercing thorns.

He knew that Miss Wilder loved him with all the emotion possible to a gentle spinster of 40. There had been no intimate word between them in the twelve years she had worked at Charles Doberman, Investments. But it was in her eyes, and in the shy, conscious way she moved. She was not unattractive, and there had been lonely moments when Doberman had been tempted. But he had not wanted to disorganize the serenity of his life alone.

Absorbed in thought, he mechanically thumbed his desk calendar to Monday's blank page. Then he saw the absurdity of what he was doing and, with a sigh of finality, lifted the brief-case, adjusted his hat carefully, and walked calmly past Miss Wilder's roses to the door.

The plane would not leave until 6. It was spring and the park was beautiful. Doberman decided on a walk before picking up his things at the apartment. He enjoyed the sunshine that built nests of light in the trees. It would always be this lovely in the new life that would begin for him tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro.

He had always intended to retire in South America, but not this soon. The doctor had made that decision for him. "Why, that depends on how well you take care of yourself," he had said, ducking Doberman's blunt

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question. "Just take it easy and that heart will see you out to a hundred."

Skirting the Central Park Zoo, he was conscious of the tightness of his fingers around the handle of the brief-case. But his mind was not tense, and his mild eyes even smiled whimsically at a passing policeman.

Doberman felt a childish impulse to stop him and explain, "I'm not so respectable as I look, Officer. I happen to be an investment broker in the act of swindling some six hundred families. Never did a dishonest thing before in my life — surprises me as much as anybody else. But I haven't much time left, and the contents of this brief-case will allow me to enjoy it."

Passing a dormant rosebush, he was reminded of Miss Wilder. He saw her again as she had looked, only two months before, when she timidly brought him a bank check for three thousand dollars. "Would you invest this for me, Mr. Doberman?" she asked hesitantly. "I suppose I should have asked you sooner, but — well, savings deposits are insured, and ever since 1929 I've been skeptical about stocks and bonds."

"I'd be glad to, Miss Wilder." He was secretly amused. "What made you change your mind?"

She looked down at her careful fingers before she replied. He thought she was blushing. "Well, working here so long, and seeing how much money you've made for other people. . . ."

He hadn't said anything for a moment, for he was already toying with the idea of South America. It was ironic that in all the years of his integrity, Miss Wilder had feared to trust her financial fate to his experienced hands.

"There's always a risk, you know," he said. "Are you really prepared to take that risk?"

"I don't think there's any risk with you, Mr. Doberman," she said simply, looking into his eyes. "If there is, I'm prepared to take it."

Now he compressed his lips and shook his head slightly. A man could easily become confused if he allowed himself to forget that life was simple and direct. His actions were only logical in a man who had no certainty that he would be alive tomorrow. The law of self-preservation was the only code of morals any sensible man could afford. *Après moi le déluge.*

Moving along briskly now, he saw Columbus Circle swing into view. Nearby he noticed a rather curious figure crouching on his heels at the side of the path. The man was about his own age, perhaps older, with a shock of uncombed white hair, and a ragged coat, patched with odd bits of material like a crazy quilt.

Doberman's steps slowed. Pigeons fluttered around to eat peanuts from the man's outstretched palm. A bag of peanuts protruded from one of the coat pockets. In profile, the man had a kind, gentle face, creased by deprivation.

He saw Doberman watching him, and said, "Ah, the poor pigeons! It's

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been a long winter for them. There aren't many who remember to feed them when the snow is down. I come in any weather, whenever I can afford peanuts. They trust me, you know, so I try not to let them down."

Doberman nodded vaguely, staring at the derelict who spent his precious few coins so that the pigeons might not go hungry. Doberman thought about the pigeons' pathetic trust that their penniless benefactor would not fail them. Fifty-four years of integrity and self-respect rose in Doberman's throat and choked him.

The pigeons he stared at became six hundred families, many with small children. Some pigeons were elderly women who lived cautiously on the dividends of their husbands' legacies. One pigeon was Miss Wilder. And he was the man squatting on his heels. Or he had been, until this day. And his coat had never been a patch quilt.

Shame stabbed through his well-nourished, well-groomed body. He turned abruptly and strode toward his office, steeling himself against the voice inside that called him a hopeless fool and clamored against the cage of his new determination.

He was glad now that he had turned ahead his desk calendar. It had been an omen, perhaps, or a secret knowledge that he could not betray his honorable past. He blessed the man with the pigeons who had shocked him out of his evil dream.

South America wasn't the only answer. He would probably last a lot longer with a woman's loving care. It would be easy to grow fond of a pleasant woman who loved roses, once he gave himself the chance. . . .

The man in the ragged coat watched Doberman's retreating figure. Then he looked around casually, reached for a plump pigeon pecking at his palm, wrung its neck deftly, tucked it under his coat, and rose.

"Sorry, my friends," he said softly to the scattering pigeons. "But, you know, a man must eat."

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

It is a great pleasure and privilege to bring you a new short story by Mary Roberts Rinehart, "the unquestioned dean of crime writing by and for women" — although her new story, warm, understanding, and full of that human interest which is the true "Rinehart touch," is equally fine reading for men, women, and children. Indeed, "The Splinter" might be called, in the most "compleat" sense, a family story; for who among us, young or old, male or female, can resist the tale of a missing boy, his injured dog, and a young veterinary whose business is mostly dogs and cats, and sometimes humans? . . .

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE: *In 1908 Mary Roberts Rinehart published* THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE, *the detective novel which is credited with having founded the Had-I-But-Known school — an important "first" in the history of the modern detective story. We are fortunate to have a first edition of this book with the original dust wrapper — a genuine rarity almost a half century after original publication. The dust wrapper is both curious and interesting by present-day standards. Let us describe it to you. The front has a decorative flower-and-rule border, the title of the book, the author's name — and nothing else. The spine has a tiny flower decoration, the title of the book, the author's name — and nothing else (not even the publisher's name — unless somehow it became rubbed off on our copy, which seems, from magnifying-glass examination, most unlikely). The back of the dust wrapper is completely blank. The front and back inner flaps are also blank. In other words, the publisher, the Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis, did not write a single word of description about the book — there is not a word of "blurb" anywhere on the dust wrapper! Nor did the publisher advertise any other book — or for that matter even advertise themselves*

Why did the publisher leave the flaps and back wrapper blank? Surely this was as uncommon procedure for 1908 as it is today. (The dust wrapper on the first edition of O. Henry's THE GENTLE GRAFTER, *also published in 1908, has a "blurb" about the book on the front wrapper, advertisements of other O. Henry books on the back wrapper, and advertisements of other authors' books on both the front and back flaps.) Did the publisher of Mary Roberts Rinehart's* THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE *not know what to say about the book? Did they not even recognize it as a new type of detective*

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story, one that might (as it did) make detective-story history? Or were they merely uncertain, deciding that silence may have been the safer part of valor?

On second thought, perhaps the publisher was right; perhaps the failure to write any kind of "blurb" for THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE *— even a provocative hint of the plot, for example — is really a lesson to contemporary publishers. Perhaps it is best to let every book speak for itself, to let readers make their own discoveries and pass their own judgments. Perhaps the day of the "blurb" is past, except that publishers and editors do not know it yet. Perhaps there should not be any more "blurbs." (And who are we to raise so embarrassing a question?)*

But "blurb" notwithstanding, we now give you the newest detective story by one of the most beloved mistresses of manhunting in the whole criminological world.

THE SPLINTER

by MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

THE DOORBELL ROUSED YOUNG DOCtor Mitchell from an exhausted nap on the old sofa in his office. It also set off a series of yaps and squeals from the dogs in the hospital behind him, and he waited for the third peal of the bell before he grunted and got up. There was something urgent about the last one, as though someone was practically leaning against the bell. It annoyed him. For the past three days and nights, along with other men, he had ranged the wooded hills behind the town, looking for a lost child. Now he was stiff and tired.

"What the hell!" he muttered, as the bell rang again.

He limped to the street door and flung it open with unreasonable fury.

"Look," he began, "get your finger off that thing and . . ."

He stopped abruptly. A small and rather frightened boy was standing there. In the early morning light he looked pale, and the freckles on his face stood out distinctly.

"Can I come in, mister?" he said. "I don't want anybody to see me."

Mitchell stepped aside and the boy darted into the office. Only then did Mitchell realize that the boy was carrying a small dog, and that he looked a little frightened.

"Sit down, son," he said. "Got your dog there, I see. Well, that's my business. What's wrong? Eat something he shouldn't?"

The boy sat down. He looked

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rather better now. A little of his color had come back.

"He's not mine," he said. "I guess you could say I stole him."

But Mitchell had recognized the dog by that time. He stared at the boy.

"That's Johnny Watson's dog, Wags," he said. "Let's hear about it. Why did you steal him?"

"I had to," the boy said, as if that explained everything, and then he sat very still.

Mitchell inspected the lad gravely. It was Johnny Watson for whom he and the posse of citizens had been searching. At first, the search had been more or less desultory, for Johnny was known to have a roving foot. At the age of seven he had already set a local record for the number of times he had been missing, but previously he had always come home of his own accord or been discovered and brought back.

Usually, Johnny's excursions were brief. He was picked up and returned home within a few hours. But this time was different. The entire town knew that he always took his dog with him, and on the evening of the day he disappeared a deer hunter found the dog up on Bald Hill, a mile or so back of the town, and carried him down. Carried him, because the dog was too lame and exhausted to walk.

The hunter took him to the police station in the county courthouse, and the chief of police sent for the boy's aunt, a Mrs. Hunt, with whom he lived.

"This Johnny's dog?" he asked.

She eyed the tired little creature without pleasure.

"I suppose it is," she said. "You can keep him. I don't want him. If you ask me Johnny's been kidnaped."

"Kidnaped? What for?" the chief snapped. "He hasn't any money, nor have you, Hattie. Don't be a fool. And you're taking the dog back, whether you want him or not."

That was the evening of the first day, but by the end of the second the town began to rouse. People were talking, for everybody knew Johnny, with his wide blue eyes and his endearing grin. Everybody knew Wags too, and when another day had gone by, a posse was formed to search the hills. No Johnny was found, however. Now he had been missing for five days, and hope had practically been abandoned.

Knowing all this, Doc Mitchell eyed the boy who was holding Johnny's dog in his arms. The youngster was nine, possibly ten, a well-built sturdy lad with a tousled head and a pudgy nose.

"All right," Mitchell said. "So you stole him. I suppose you had a reason. Better be a good one, son."

The boy squirmed.

"I think Mrs. Hunt wants him to die," he said simply. "She keeps him tied in the yard day and night, in the cold. And he's lame, too. His foot's awful sore."

Carefully he put the dog on the floor, and Mitchell saw that he was standing on three legs.

"Why on earth do you think she

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wants him to die?" he asked sharply.

"All the kids think so, mister," the boy said quietly. "They think she knows where Johnny is, and she doesn't care if he's found or not."

"That's a pretty bad thing to say," Mitchell snapped. He got up and lifted the dog. He was thin, and one paw was badly swollen; but he seemed to realize he was in friendly hands, and wagged his stubby tail.

"Hello, Wags," the young veterinary said. "In a bit of trouble, eh? Want me to look at it?" He glanced at the boy, who looked more cheerful.

"I thought if you would fix his foot, and maybe hide him here for a while, I'd pay for him. I've got two dollars."

Mitchell smiled.

"Let's not bother about that just yet," he said. "I like dogs, and I've always got one or two free boarders around the place. Anyhow, Wags and I are old friends. Johnny used to bring him in now and then. Want to stick around while I look at the foot?"

"I'd like to, if it's all right with you."

Mitchell took the boy to the small operating room, and as he prepared the table he learned who he was. His name was Harold Johnson, but he was usually called Pete. He lived in the house next to the Hunt place, and he knew Johnny well and liked him. Mitchell eyed Pete.

"Have the kids got any idea where Johnny went?" he said casually. But to his surprise the boy's face went suddenly blank.

"No, sir," he said flatly. "Only Wags kept trying to get up into the hills, before she tied him."

Mitchell did not press the subject. He picked up the dog and put him on his side on the table. Wags did not move. It was as though he knew something good was going to be done to him, and except for a low whine he was quiet while Mitchell examined the paw.

"Looks like he's got something in it," he said. "I'll have to open it, son. Want to hold him while I get after it?"

"Yes, sir. I'd like to."

Looking down at him, Mitchell had an absurd desire to pat the boy's hair, which needed cutting and had a cowlick to boot. He restrained himself and picked up a scalpel.

"Better not look," he said. "It'll take only a couple of seconds." And a few moments later, "All over, son. Now let's see what we found."

What he drew out with the forceps was a long wooden splinter, and Pete gave him a sickly grin.

"So that's what it was," the boy said, and letting go of the dog found a chair and sat down.

Mitchell held the splinter up and examined it, and he rather thought the dog looked at it too. At least he raised his head. Then he dropped it back again and closed his eyes.

"Looks as though this came off a board somewhere," he said. "No houses up in the hills, are there? Nobody lives there that I know of."

Pete didn't know. Except for visits to a picnic ground not far away, the

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town children were not allowed in the hills. There were stories of bears, and one had been shot there not too long ago. Pete was looking better now, but he waited until Wags had been put into a cage before he came out with what was in his mind.

"Look, mister," he said. "Maybe Johnny comes back, or maybe he doesn't. But could you keep this a sort of secret? Mrs. Hunt could have me arrested."

"Why wouldn't Johnny come back? Any place we could have missed looking for him?"

Pete looked unhappy.

"I guess not, if he was where you could see him," he said.

"What does that mean?" Mitchell asked sharply. But Pete slid off his chair and picked up his cap.

"That's just talk," he said. "And thanks a lot. It's time I went home for my breakfast."

Mitchell watched the boy leave. He was a likable kid, he thought. But before he went upstairs to his apartment for a shower he called Joe, his assistant, into his office.

"We've got a new boarder," he said. "He needs sleep right now, but when he wakes up give him a good feed. And if any one inquires for him we haven't got him."

"What's the idea?" said Joe. "We got him and we ain't got him. We got plenty, Doc, without stealing them."

"He's Wags, Johnny Watson's dog," Mitchell said. "And I wish to God he could talk. He knows something, Joe."

Joe looked startled.

"You think he knows where the boy went, Doc?"

"I think he knows where the boy is. That may be something different. And stop calling me 'Doc'."

The next morning, after coffee in his apartment upstairs, Mitchell made his rounds of his small hospital, doing dressings, putting a new cast on the broken leg of a Great Dane, inspecting a blue Persian cat who had had difficulty with her first litter of kittens, and feeding a banana to a small chimp left there by a traveling carnival. Johnny Watson had loved the chimp. The last time he had been in they had been sitting together, and the boy had had his arms around the small ape.

It made Mitchell feel a little heartsick to remember.

By noon he took off his professional coat and dressed for the street, and soon after he was in the office of the chief of police.

The chief looked tired.

"Look, Doc," he said, "I hope this is important. I ain't as young as I used to be, and this last three days have about finished me. All I want is to get home and soak in a hot bath."

Mitchell nodded.

"Maybe it's important, maybe not, Chief," he said. "You know these hills pretty well. Any cabins in them?"

"Cabins? No, not that I know of. Hunters who go in there use tents. Was a bunk-house on Bald Hill for workers in the old quarry about twenty years ago, but they moved

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out after the highway was finished. Only a ruin now. Roof's fallen in." He eyed Mitchell curiously. "Why? We searched the quarry and the bunkhouse too, what's left of it. Combed the whole place. The boy's not there."

"That's not far from where the dog was found, is it?"

"Still got a bee in your bonnet, Doc, haven't you?" the chief said quizzically. "Yep. Used to be a road up there to the quarry, but it's gone now. Only a sort of track. Dog was near it, all tuckered out."

Mitchell lit a cigarette and smoked it absently.

"That's a mile or so away," he said. "What was the dog doing there?"

The chief grunted.

"Chasing a squirrel or a rabbit, and got lost. That's easy."

Mitchell got up.

"It's too easy, Chief," he said. "Why did the boy keep running away? Got any ideas about it? I suppose a psychiatrist would say there was a reason for it."

"I'm no psychiatrist," the chief said, yawning. "I'm only a cop. How the hell should I know?"

Mitchell persisted. "What about the Hunt woman? Think she had anything to do with it? Was she good to the boy?"

The chief looked indignant.

"Now look," he said, "I've known Hattie Hunt all my life. She's pretty well on in years to raise a kid. But she fed him and took care of him. She did her duty to him, and that's a fact."

Mitchell was thoughtful.

"Orphan, wasn't he?"

"Yep. Plane crash. Both parents killed. Damned lucky for the boy he wasn't with them. The father had the promise of a job on the Coast, and during a stopover in Nebraska the kid fell and broke his leg. They had to leave him in a hospital in Omaha, so when the authorities found the mother's purse in the wreck, with a letter in it from Hattie, they notified me and sent me the letter. I told Hattie, and she went out and got him. Got the dog too. Seems a nurse in the hospital gave it to him. Pretty hard on the old girl, if you ask me."

"Where did all this happen?"

"Somewhere out near Omaha. I forget the place."

"You still have the letter?"

The chief stared at him.

"Look, Doc," he said. "That's three years ago, and what the hell has it got to do with the boy's disappearance?"

"Only what I said — that it's queer for a child to keep running away time after time."

"You get them now and then," the chief said indifferently. "Kids with a wandering foot." He grinned. "Lots of dogs do that too, don't they? Only they usually have a damn good reason!"

This small jest seemed to please the chief; he got up and straightened himself with a grunt.

"I'm going home and get a hot bath and a decent meal for a change," he said. "But maybe I do have the letter. I'll see."

He went stiffly to an ancient

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wooden file in a corner and fumbled with one of the drawers lettered *H*, from which he took out a pair of bedroom slippers and a soiled shirt, which last he greeted with pleasure.

"So that's where the damned thing was," he said, gratified. "If you'd heard my wife going on about it you'd have thought I was involved with another woman. Well, let's see."

In due time he located a folder and brought it back to the desk. The letter *H* seemed to cover a number of things, from a stolen horse to a prescription for falling hair; but at last he produced a letter and passed it triumphantly to Mitchell. It had come from the Police Department of Omaha, Nebraska, and was a brief description of the parents' death and the boy's situation. Enclosed was the letter from Mrs. Hunt to the dead woman. It was not a particularly affectionate one.

Dear Emily, it said. *In answer to your request I can only say I am totally unable to help you. As you know I objected and still object to your marriage. Aside from that I have barely adequate means to live on, and your suggestion that I help you because you have a child is outrageous. That is your fault and your husband's responsibility. Certainly not mine.*

There was no closing — it was merely signed Hattie Hunt, and the writing was small and crabbed. Mitchell handed back the letter, but made a note of the date of the one from the Omaha police. The chief watched him with amusement.

"So what?" he said. "There was a receipt from the hospital in the purse too, so they located the boy and Hattie went West and got the kid. Only thing she objected to was the dog, but Johnny wouldn't let go of him. Raised hell when she tried to leave him behind. Maybe you can understand that, Mitch. You must like dogs, to be in your business."

"I like them better than some people," Mitchell said drily.

He left soon after that, feeling a little foolish. All he had was a dog with a sore paw, a rather large splinter from a board of some sort, and a boy named Pete who almost certainly believed Johnny was dead. Still, that in itself was curious. Children did not usually think in such terms. However, what with radio and television these days . . .

That afternoon Mitchell put the splinter from Wags' paw under his microscope and examined it carefully. It was pine, he thought, from an old piece of pine board, and of course there were a dozen explanations for it. Only one thing was sure. It had been in the dog's foot for several days, to have caused the fester it had.

What had Pete meant about the Hunt woman? Mitchell knew her merely by sight, a dour-looking woman of sixty or thereabouts, always shabbily dressed in rusty black, and with a hard unsmiling face. Not the loving sort, to judge by her letter, and that was an understatement if he ever heard one. But it was a long way from murder. And why murder anyhow?

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What possible motive would she have for getting rid of the boy?

He sat back, considering. Up to the finding of Wags on Bald Hill, Johnny's disappearance had been regarded as one of his normal wayward excursions. It was only afterwards that things looked ominous, since boy and dog were inseparable, and then search parties had started out. Maybe the kids had something, he thought, and after some hesitation he wrote out and telephoned a night letter to the police in Omaha, wording it carefully because of the local operator.

"Seven-year-old boy named John Watson missing here. Was injured in accident your neighborhood three years ago and taken to hospital your city. Possibly trying to make his way back. Be glad of any details of said accident and name of hospital. Please wire collect."

He gave his name and address, and was rewarded by the warmth in the night operator's voice after she read it back to him.

"You know," she said. "I never thought of that. I'll bet that's just what Johnny's doing."

"It's a possibility, anyhow," he said. "Just keep it to yourself, will you? I don't want to hurt the chief's feelings."

"That old blabbermouth!"

Mitchell made his final rounds at ten o'clock that night, and Wags seemed comfortable. He decided to walk off his uneasiness, and it was a half hour later when he found himself near the Hunt property. It stood back from the street, as did the other houses in the vicinity, and in the moonless night it looked dark and gloomy, a two-story frame building once white and now a dirty gray against its background of low hills. It was unlighted save for a dim glow from a rear window — the kitchen, he thought — and rather amused at himself, he turned in and went quietly to the back of the house.

Seen through a window, the kitchen proved to be empty and he was about to leave when he became aware of a small figure beside him.

"She's out looking for Wags," Pete whispered. "She's gone up the hill with a flashlight. Why would she think he goes up there? It's kinda funny, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know, son," Mitchell said frankly. "It's pretty rough going. I'll wait here a while, so you'd better go home. You don't want your mother coming out after you, do you?"

Left alone, the young doctor watched the hill behind the house, but no light appeared, and after a few minutes he stepped onto the porch and tried the kitchen door. It was unlocked, and with a prayer that Pete was not watching he stepped inside. It was a dreary room, floored with old linoleum, and with a tin coffee pot on a rusty stove. It looked as though little cooking was done there, and with a final look at the hillside he moved into the house itself.

He had no flashlight, but by using a match here and there he got a fair idea of the rooms. They showed neat-

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ness but a sort of genteel poverty, and even in the basement there was no sign of a board from which Wags could have got the splinter. Only on the second floor did he find anything odd. If Johnny Watson had ever lived there there was no sign of it. Just one room, obviously Mrs. Hunt's, showed any signs of occupancy. The others were bleak and empty, even to the closets.

It seemed incredible that the boy's room should be empty. Had she sent him away, *clothes and all?* It was the only explanation he could think of, and he began to think his previous apprehension might have been absurd. Nevertheless, he was infuriated — remembering the long hard search and the anxious town, while in all probability she had known all along where the boy was.

He got out of the house just in time. There was a light coming down the hill. It came steadily to the edge of the woods. Then whoever carried it stopped and extinguished it. Mitchell slid around the corner of the house and waited until, by the light from the kitchen window, he recognized Mrs. Hunt. She was in a heavy coat, with a handkerchief tied over her head, and at the foot of the steps he confronted her. He could hear her gasp as he greeted her.

"Good evening," he said. "Sorry if I frightened you. I was taking a walk, and I saw your light in the woods. Nothing wrong, is there?"

For a moment she could not speak. She had obviously been badly scared, and she dropped the flashlight, as though she could no longer hold it. When he picked it up she made no move to take it.

"Who are you?" she said. "Whoever you are you've no business here. What are you doing — spying on me?"

"Not at all." His voice was casual. "I thought someone might be in trouble. My name's Mitchell — Doctor Mitchell. If you're all right I'll be going on."

But she had recovered by that time and eyed him suspiciously.

"So that's who you are!" she said angrily. "Maybe you know where my dog is. Maybe that boy next door stole him and took him to you. If you've got him I want him back, or I'll make plenty of trouble."

He laughed.

"That's rather fantastic, isn't it?" he said. "Why should the boy do anything like that? Was the dog sick?"

She ignored that, sitting down abruptly on the kitchen steps, and Mitchell held out the flashlight to her. In doing so he snapped the light on, and he had a momentary glimpse of her. Wherever she had been she had had no easy time. The heavy coat had accumulated considerable brush and pine needles, and below it her stockings were torn to rags. She looked exhausted too, her elderly face an ugly gray. He cut off her protests as he gave her the flashlight.

"If it's Johnny's dog you're talking about," he said, "I'd be a little slow about accusing this boy, whoever he

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is. Any kid who knew Wags — and a lot of them did — might have taken him."

She seemed to be thinking that over. Then she got up and climbed the steps.

"Well, let whoever has him keep him," she said. "I don't like dogs. I never did."

It was no use going on, he realized, and she ended the conversation by going into the house and slamming the kitchen door. In a sense he felt relieved. If she had sent the boy away he was probably all right, and with this hope, and because he was tired from the days of searching, Mitchell slept rather late the next morning.

The answer from Omaha arrived at noon that day. It was fully detailed, having been sent collect, and it verified the airplane crash and the deaths of the Watsons; also the boy's broken leg and his having been claimed by a relative named Mrs. Hunt. It added something however which puzzled him. It said: *Left for East by car.*

He wandered in again to see the chief that afternoon. Evidently his wife had taken him in hand, for the chief wore a clean shirt and even a necktie. He was in a bad humor, however.

"Now see here, Doc," he said, "the Johnny Watson case is closed, and I'm damned glad of it. Unless," he added suspiciously, "you've got the dog. In that case you're under arrest, and no fooling."

Mitchell managed to look surprised. "Dog?" he said. "What dog?"

"All right, so you haven't got him," the chief growled. "Probably chewed the rope and got away. What brings you here anyhow?"

"I just had an idea," Mitchell said. "What would you do with a kid you didn't want? How would you get rid of him? By car?"

The chief eyed him.

"Well, God knows there are times when I could spare some of mine," he said. "What are you talking about? The Hunt woman didn't get rid of Johnny. You can bet on that. She had nothing to gain by it. Besides, she has no car, if that's what you mean, and couldn't drive it if she had one."

Mitchell was puzzled as he left. How could Mrs. Hunt have spirited Johnny away? — if she had done so. Not by bus, or train, that was sure. Both trainmen and bus drivers knew the little blond boy and his dog by sight. Yet the empty room in the Hunt house certainly meant she did not expect him back. There was only one other explanation — and that was one he did not have to accept.

As a result he motored into the city that afternoon, carrying the splinter from Wags' foot in a cellophane envelope, and went to the crime laboratory at police headquarters. After a long delay he got to a technician and had it put under a microscope, where a young man in a white coat worked over it.

"Nothing very interesting about it," he said after a time. "Looks like blood and pus on it, if that's what you want."

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"No. I want to know about the splinter itself. What is it?"

"Pine," said the laboratory man. "Probably came off a board. Apparently been varnished at one time. Mean anything to you?"

"Not unless I can find where it came from," Mitchell said grimly, and took his departure.

Down on the street he stood by his car and wondered what else he could do. After all, the youngster had been gone before, although never as long as this. And there was no real reason to believe this was not simply another runaway. All Mitchell had was a small boy's belief something had happened to Johnny, a dog with a splinter which might have come from anywhere, and a woman who apparently did not expect the child to come back.

So strongly was all this in his mind that he was not really surprised to see her in person. She did not notice him, but she had come out of a garage across the street, and it seemed so strange a place for her to be that he waited until he saw her take the bus back home before he went in himself.

There were a couple of chauffeurs loafing there, and somewhere in the back an employee was working on the tube of a tire. In a corner was a small glass-enclosed office with a clerk at a desk, and after looking about Mitchell went in there. The man looked up annoyed, after making an entry in a ledger, and Mitchell's voice was apologetic.

"Sorry to bother you," he said, "but I was to take my aunt home in my car. I'm afraid I missed her. Elderly woman in black."

The clerk nodded.

"You missed her all right, brother," he said. "At least it sounds like her."

Mitchell nodded.

"I try to keep an eye on her," he said. "She's peculiar at times. She wasn't trying to buy a car, was she?"

"Buy a car!" The clerk grinned. "She's had an old second-hand one here in dead storage for three years. Never took it out, but comes in now and then to pay her storage bill. Name's Barnes. That right?"

"Not my aunt, then," Mitchell said, and was about to leave when the man spoke again.

"Funny thing about this old dame," he said. "Keeps it here all that time, and now she wants it. Came in ten days ago or so and ordered it put in condition in a hurry. Then never showed up again until today!"

"Did she say when she wanted it?" Mitchell hoped his voice was steady. "Might be my aunt after all. She gets ideas like that."

"No. Just wanted it ready. Said she might need it soon. That's all."

Mitchell went rather dazedly into the street. Some things were clear, of course. What had happened to the car in which she had brought the boy East, for instance. And she had meant to use it again a few days ago, only Wags had been found and as a result the search had been started. She had not dared make a move then, but that either the boy or his body was hidden away somewhere Mitchell no longer

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doubted, and his blood froze as he considered the possibilities.

Why had she wanted to get rid of the child? And why had the body not been found? She gained nothing by his death, if that was what had happened. Or did she? Some inkling of the truth stirred in him, and it frightened him with its implications. As soon as he got home he called the hospital in Omaha and listened with interest to the reply.

"Caused some excitement, I suppose?" he said.

"What do you think?" said the remote voice.

That afternoon for the first time he really believed Johnny Watson was dead. It was without any enthusiasm that he received Joe's report on Wags.

"Foot's fine," Joe said. "Only he ain't too happy, Doc. He ain't eatin' right, for one thing. I gave him a mess of good hamburger today, and he just looked at it."

"I'm going to need him tonight, Joe," Mitchell said. "I'll carry him if I have to, but you don't know where he is. Get that?"

Joe looked bewildered.

"That woman, she's raisin' hell about him," he said dolefully. "You want to get into trouble?"

"Very likely," Mitchell said drily. "I don't know just when I'll be taking him, but I have an idea where he wants to go."

At 6 o'clock — supper time in the town — he called Pete on the phone and asked him if Pete was busy that night. When the boy said he was not, only some homework, Mitchell said he had a job for him.

"I want to know if Mrs. Hunt leaves her house tonight," he said. "Can you do it? And if she does will you telephone me at once?"

"Sure. That's easy," Pete said excitedly.

"All right. Only don't try to follow her. Just call me up here. I'll be waiting."

Nothing happened that night, however, and the next day was endless. Mitchell did his usual work without enthusiasm, and late in the afternoon dropped in on a harassed police chief, who scowled when he saw him.

"If it's about the Watson kid," he said sourly, "why don't you mind your own business, which is dogs?"

Mitchell grinned and lit a cigarette.

"All right," he said. "Now I'll ask you one. Where up in the hills would the dog Wags get a splinter of varnished wood in his foot?"

"Well, for God's sake!" the chief exploded. "Where does any dog pick up a splinter?"

"It lamed him so badly he couldn't walk. Remember where he was found. The fellow who found him had to carry him back to town. Remember that?"

"It just occurs to me," the chief said suspiciously, "that you know too damned much about this dog. How'd you learn about a splinter?"

"I took it out of his foot," Mitchell said, and slammed out of the office.

He expected trouble after that, but evidently the chief was not interested.

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At 6 o'clock Pete called up to say he would be on the job again that night, if it was okay. Mitchell said it was certainly okay with him, and rang off grinning. But after that the evening seemed endless. He stayed near the telephone, trying to read a copy of *Veterinary Medicine*, but when by 9 o'clock there was no message from Pete he finally called the boy's home. Pete, however, was not there, and his mother was worried.

"He left quite a while ago," she said. "I don't know what got into him. I was using the phone about the young people's meeting at the church, and he acted very excited. Then when I finished he was gone."

"He didn't say where he was going?"

"No. But he said if you called I was to tell you somebody had started up the hill. I wasn't really listening. Only he knows he isn't allowed up there, and it's too late for him to go to the movies."

Mitchell was sure where Pete had gone, and he felt a cold chill down his spine. How long had he been gone? And what would happen if he overtook the Hunt woman? She must be desperate by this time, if what Mitchell believed was true. Wherever Johnny was hidden, alive or dead, she would be on her way there now, and Pete was not safe in the hands of a half-crazed woman.

He never remembered much that followed. He must have picked up Wags and got into his car, and some time later he was climbing through woods and dense underbrush, using his flashlight cautiously. But it seemed an interminable time and an endless struggle when, with the dog in his arms, he saw a light moving slowly, ahead and above him.

The dog saw it too and whined, and Mitchell put a hand over his muzzle. After that he was even more cautious, climbing carefully and without his flash. Once he fell headlong and almost lost the dog.

It seemed an hour or more before he reached the edge of the clearing on Bald Hill and stopped. Mrs. Hunt was there, near the ruined bunk-house, sitting as though exhausted on a fallen timber, and his heart contracted sharply as he saw that she held a long-handled spade in her hands.

There was no sign of Pete, but Wags had recognized the place. He gave a short sharp bark and leaped out of Mitchell's arms. In a second he had shot past the woman and was scratching furiously at the door of a small shack adjoining the bunk-house. The woman leaped to her feet and caught up the spade.

"You little devil!" she said hoarsely. "Just stay there till I get you."

Then Mitchell heard Pete's shrill young voice from somewhere among the trees.

"Don't you touch him," he screamed at her. "Let him alone. And I'm getting the police. You're a bad wicked woman."

From the stirring in the underbrush Mitchell realized that Pete was running down the hill, and drew a long

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breath. The woman seemed stunned. She barely noticed him as he approached her.

"All right," he said. "Where is he, Mrs. Hunt?"

She did not speak, but after a moment she raised a heavy hand and pointed to the shack near the bunkhouse, where the dog was scratching wildly at an improvised door of old pine boards. And where a little boy inside was calling weakly:

"Hello, Wags," he said. "I knew you'd come back."

Early the next morning Mitchell sat in the chief's office, looking smug.

"So you combed the whole place!" he said. "Why on earth didn't you look in that shack?"

"Why the hell should I?" the chief said irritably. "It was boarded up and bolted on the outside. The boy couldn't lock himself in from the outside, could he? Why didn't he yell?"

"Probably afraid it was her," Mitchell said. "He was always afraid of her. That's why he kept running off. Or he may have been given a dose of sleeping pills. I don't suppose we'll ever know. But I imagine she didn't mean to do anything drastic in the beginning. Maybe take him by car to the Coast and get rid of him in a home, or something of the sort. But when she learned from the insurance company a day or so ago that she had to produce a body or wait seven years for the money . . ."

"Money! What money?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" Mitchell said, as if surprised. "His parents took out airplane accident insurance before they left Omaha, naming the boy as beneficiary. Twenty-five thousand each. It didn't cost much. And the company paid it to Johnny in the hospital, with your friend Hattie as guardian, or something like that. I imagine," he added smoothly, "that fifty thousand dollars has been eating her heart out. She's his only relative."

"Are you saying she meant to *murder* him?" the chief said incredulously.

"I am. Only you'll never jail her. She'll go to an institution somewhere."

He ignored the chief's shocked face and dropped something on the desk.

"You might like to have this," he said. "It's the splinter that saved Johnny Watson's life."

He left the chief staring at it in complete bewilderment and drove back to his hospital, where Joe eyed him skeptically, his torn clothes, his dirty face, and unshaven jaw.

"Must have had a big night, Doc," he said. "How's the other fellow?"

"Doing fine in the hospital," Mitchell said cheerfully. "How's Wags?"

"Looks like he's had a big night too," he said. "But he's sleepin' fine."

"Good for him," Mitchell said, and went upstairs.

Downstairs it was feeding time, with the usual pandemonium of whines and barks, and he was reminded of the talk he had had with the chief of police a day or so ago. He had said then that he liked some dogs better than some people, and all at once he knew why.

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FOR MEN ONLY

(*continued from page 21*)

by ROY VICKERS

Inspector Kyle looked from one face to another, learning nothing except that they would be a difficult bunch to handle. Whether it was a put-up job or not, they had taken a considered position and were standing together. Routine provided for this tactic: nail them down in their position before breaking them individually.

Broughby spoke again.

"If you're ready to hear the circumstances —"

"Before we go into details," interrupted Kyle, "I'd like to know whether you all agree with what Mr. Broughby has said — that one of you in this room killed that girl?"

He happened to glance at Stranack first.

"I agree that it is an inescapable inference," said Stranack.

Millard and Hardelow signified agreement.

Crendon made a qualification. "Broughby's statement is true, but misleading on one point. He intended to convey to you our belief that one of the *four* of us in this room — Broughby, Hardelow, Millard, or myself — killed Mabel Rouse. Not one of the four of us suspects Mr. Stranack."

There were murmurs of assent.

Crendon went on: "With that amendment, I agree with Broughby's statement. I can add — in the hope that it will help you — that I personally am convinced that Hardelow can also be eliminated. And I shall be happy to give evidence to that effect at the proper time."

Kyle was delighted. By inference Crendon accused Broughby and Millard, jointly or individually. If the others would follow suit, there would be hope of the familiar situation in which conspirators fall out and accuse each other — or eliminate all but one.

"I can't vouch for anybody — except Stranack, of course," said Broughby.

"I agree with Crendon," put in Millard. "Stranack is out of it. I eliminate Hardelow as well. He hasn't been out of my sight long enough."

There came a moan from Hardelow.

"That puts me in a very humiliating position. I ought to return the compliment, but I can't — except Stranack, of course."

Kyle was disappointed.

"Can you eliminate anybody, Mr. Stranack?"

"Sorry, Inspector. I didn't keep tab on anybody's movements."

Kyle refused to give up hope. If he could split them at even one point at the start, a mass of detailed work would be bypassed.

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"Then we come back to Mr. Broughby's statement. You all agree on eliminating Mr. Stranack. Two of you also eliminate Mr. Hardelow. That means — letting me off the 'misters,' please — Millard suspects Crendon and Broughby. Crendon suspects Millard and —"

"Pardon *me*, Inspector!" said Crendon. "I suspect no one. I have not a tittle of evidence against anybody. You may reasonably believe or disbelieve my statements. You may draw the inference that either Broughby or Millard must be guilty. But you cannot attribute to me a suspicion of either — or of both."

A lawyer's distinction, thought Kyle, but he could not refute it. In a general way, he disliked lawyers. This one evidently intended to throw his weight about.

"Quite right, Mr. Crendon, and I apologize. The fact is, I have never before handled a case involving gentlemen of your position." He was being spuriously humble about it. "But when we get down to bedrock, I'm on familiar ground, you might say. Criminals generally accuse one another — and that puts 'em where we want 'em. You gentlemen have dug your toes in and are telling me that not one of you has so much as a suspicion of the others — which is much the same thing, only — gentlemanly side up, if you understand me."

He paused, confident of his effect.

"Do you realize that it's possible — I only say possible — that you might *all* be charged with murder?"

"Of course we do!" exploded Hardelow. "That's why we're behaving like this. For God's sake, Inspector, don't get it into your head that we're a bunch of gangsters trying to pull a fast one on the police!"

Kyle, looking at the round, earnest face, suppressed a smile.

"I didn't suggest gangsters."

"If you suspect this is a criminal conspiracy," cut in Millard, "ask yourself why we didn't dump poor Mabel overboard. At worst, it would have been much safer than voluntarily walking into a lion's den like this."

Before Kyle could prevent it, Crendon had seized the initiative.

"There can be no possible charge of conspiracy!"

Kyle sniffed, as if he had received a blow in the face.

"Do you believe, Inspector, that within the confines of this yacht it would be possible to plan and carry out a murder — and agree upon a course of action to be taken in regard to the police — unless Mr. Stranack were one of the conspirators? Surely you do not!"

Kyle was ready to back down rather than attack Stranack, who could remove himself as a witness if he were offended by simply claiming diplomatic immunity.

"Evidence will be adduced," continued Crendon, "that I met Mr. Stranack in Washington last year when I was there on Government business. He landed in England for the first time five weeks ago and

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looked me up yesterday. He mentioned that he had seen Cherry Dane doing her floor show and would like to meet her in person. I telephoned Broughby and fixed it. No one will believe that Mr. Stranack would bring scandal on his Embassy — to say nothing of risking his neck — in order to oblige four men, three of whom he had never met until this morning."

Another lawyer's point, noted Kyle. It was common knowledge that when all the conspirators were arrested one of them generally squealed. Who but a lawyer would have spotted that Stranack's presence could be used to rob the police of a powerful weapon?

"Furthermore," resumed Crendon, "I ask you to remember that each of us has a career. At the trial — and we devoutly hope that you will be able to bring this case to trial — a single adverse comment by the judge on the conduct of any one of us would take years to live down. Of the five of us present, four will be desperately anxious to help you find the murderer."

So far, Kyle admitted to himself, his shock tactics had yielded nothing. It was a novelty to him to be bullied by the suspects in a murder case. Their unusual behavior, however, did not mean that they were unusual men. Broughby, he had looked up. Crendon's name was often cropping up in the papers as counsel in insurance litigation. The other two were of the same social stratum. No matter! The job would be the same, even if it had to be done with kid gloves.

"I say everybody!" It was a joyous shout from Hardelow. "Why are we all harping on murder? We told the Inspector it was murder, but we may be wrong. Suppose it was suicide?"

Kyle alone was startled. He had made the recruit's mistake of accepting the statement of murder without proof. He had let the special circumstances disturb his routine. It was Broughby who unconsciously saved the detective's face.

"Rot! Mabel would never commit suicide."

"Presumably," said Crendon, "we shall now adjourn to Scotland Yard for questioning?"

Kyle had had enough of Crendon for the present.

"We'll see what we can do on the spot, first," he said. "You are anxious to coöperate — four of you, anyhow. I will therefore ask you all to remain in this saloon until I come back — and in the meantime to give my staff any help they may require."

They would wait long enough, reflected Kyle, to get over their enthusiasm for presenting neat little riddles in law to the police. Crendon, for instance, was going to be taught that there's quite a lot of law that never crops up in a law court.

Sergeant Dobson met Kyle at the head of the companionway.

"River police launch standing by, sir. I told 'em they'd have to cruise 'emselves off till the doctor and

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the photographers have finished. Dr. Menton is waiting for you now."

Kyle closed the doors of the saloon.

"There are five men in there, Dobson — one of 'em a lawyer. You heard me — a lawyer — They've promised not to move until I come back." He grinned. "They don't know how long I'm going to be — the lawyer can work that out for 'em! Send a man in to take their dabs. One of 'em — Millard — has a bloodstain on his trousers, but he's also got a bandage on his hand, so he'll have a tale. We'll have the blood group of that stain right way. They're to be treated very lightly — they're all smiles and we want 'em like that."

The conference with Dr. Menton took place behind the closed door of the forward guest cabin. He was an able but gloomy little man. In their work together, Kyle had picked up a little physiology and Menton had picked up a lot of caution.

"I haven't much for you," said Menton. "She has been dead for about three hours." He was inclined to leave it at that.

"Would it be going too far to say that the knife sticking in her throat might have something to do with it?" prompted Kyle.

"We need look no further for the weapon," pronounced Menton. "Judging by the position of the arms and the limited ejection of blood, I think it's a fairly safe guess that the examination will determine the cause of death as shock following partial asphyxia."

"Very interesting," remarked Kyle politely. "Did she do all that by herself or did somebody help her?"

Kyle had expected a confident assurance. But the doctor looked gloomier than ever.

"You don't want me to comment on the position of that jumper which, of course, would have left her almost naked. Nor is it my province to dwell upon the psychological absurdity of suicide in such circumstances."

"Try this one, Doctor. If she did stab herself, could she have wiped the handle of the knife afterwards?"

"No — of course not! That would have been definitely impossible."

"In your opinion, how long could she have lived after the blow had been delivered?"

"In my opinion — based on a cursory examination and subject to correction at the post-mortem examination — only a few seconds."

When the doctor had gone, Kyle stepped across the corridor to the deceased's cabin.

Sergeant Dobson was standing in the doorway.

"I'd like you to look at that skirt, sir."

Kyle knelt and peered at the tartan skirt lying close to the bed.

"Looks like the imprint of a shoe, ball to toe, left side of left shoe — that's what I see."

"So do I, sir. It isn't the doctor's shoe. I warned him, and I watched him until he'd finished." He added: "Simpkins said he doubted whether the photo would be any use —

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couldn't get a shadow on it as it lay."

"The lab can have a look at that. See to the packing yourself, will you. Ask 'em to make a rush job of it. Collect all the shoes you want off the gentry-an'-aristocracy in the saloon. But leave Stranack out of it. He has diplomatic immunity — he's waiving it at present, but he might change his mind if we push him. Treat him like glass, but you needn't be afraid of that lawyer. Hi, what's that?"

Kyle was looking at a broad white circle chalked on the carpet in a corner of the cabin.

"That's where I found a wedding ring, sir. It's packed now and in the inventory."

Kyle nodded. He remembered that Broughby had spoken as if there had been a wedding ring on the dead girl's finger. While he continued his scrutiny of the cabin, his thoughts played round that wedding ring. Something funny there! Women don't drop wedding rings by accident. Before taking an afternoon nap, a woman decides to put her wedding ring on the floor in a corner of the cabin? Ridiculous!

"The wrong shows the right." That slogan had helped him more than once. No one had "put" the wedding ring on the carpet. If she had taken it off before lying down, she'd have put it on the dressing table; and if it had been brushed off by accident it couldn't have rolled some ten feet along a carpet. Therefore the ring had been *thrown* in the corner.

Assume murder. The murderer removes the ring and flings it into the corner of the cabin. Physically possible — but too darned silly to have happened.

Much more likely that the girl herself flung it there. While she was lying on the bed. In what circumstances does a woman take off her wedding ring and fling it across the room? When she's having a hell of a row with her old man — even if he's only an honorary old man, as you might say.

But Broughby, innocent or guilty, would not have said it was on her finger if he knew it was on the floor, where the police would be sure to find it.

Therefore she was not having a hammer-and-tongs with Broughby when she threw off the ring. Having hammer-and-tongs with somebody else? Then why did she throw away the wedding ring?

"Shows it's no good guessing without the facts," Kyle muttered, and left the cabin. In the corridor he caught sight of one of his own men apparently looting the wardrobe in the forward guest cabin.

"What the devil are you up to, Bassett?"

"Looking for trousers, sir, at owner's request. That bloodstain. Millard said he must be provided with another pair or he wouldn't coöperate."

By the wheelhouse Kyle found Sergeant Dobson arguing with a member of the river police.

"All right, Dobson. They can move

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the body as soon as you've packed that skirt and finished the inventory. I shall be in my room. Leave one man on board and two on the pier."

The doors of the saloon opened with some violence and Crendon appeared.

"I take it, Inspector, that your investigations will not be impeded if we keep these doors open. It's very hot in the saloon."

"That's quite all right, Mr. Crendon."

Before stepping ashore, Kyle spoke under his breath to Dobson.

"Tough on him. He hoped I'd object, so's he could trot up an Act of Parliament about it."

Bassett passed by, carrying a pair of white flannel trousers.

The white trousers, which were too long for Millard, increased the effect of lopsidedness caused by wearing one shoe. The three others who were also half shoeless became aware that only the American looked as unruffled as when he had come aboard. The company itself was becoming lopsided.

Millard drew back the curtain of a porthole and looked over the pier to the Embankment.

"No reporters in sight. So far, we haven't drawn a crowd."

No one accepted the opening for a little light chatter to ease the burden of silence. Their social instincts were paralyzed. In the mind of the innocent was the knowledge that a man of their own kind, sharing their ethical outlook, had stepped beyond the pale by committing murder. Not yet could four out of the five imagine themselves in danger of the hangman.

In addition they were suffering the emotional confusion of hating the man who had killed Mabel without having anything approaching a reasonable suspicion of which particular man was to be hated.

"I can't stand a lot of this waiting about," complained Hardelow. He wanted to talk and listen to others talking. His amiability had already converted the murderer into an abstraction which could be mentioned without embarrassment. "Now that we have reported to the police, I don't see why we have to go on staring in front of us like stuffed sheep."

Stranack answered, with the air of a man rising to a difficult occasion.

"I don't know anything about police procedure in this country, but I guess Crendon's advice not to discuss the case would hold good anywhere. Once you start discussion you might agree on a version. The police drill a hole in it, and there you are."

"And if we don't agree on a version, we shall contradict each other," objected Hardelow. "And anyway, not one of us intends to tell the whole truth about poor Mabel."

"Not one of us knows it," said Millard. "We shall each tell a different truth about her. And we shall all be disbelieved."

"You needn't worry," Crendon assured him. "Discrepancy on small points makes a good impression. Anyway, you're out of it, Hardelow. Millard and I have both given you an alibi."

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"But the police don't seem to have accepted it, or they wouldn't have taken my other shoe — though how you can leave a footprint on a boat on a dry day beats me!"

Broughby, who had been holding himself aloof, now unbent.

"What we tell the police can't prove anything, or it would already have proved it to us."

"So unless they find fingerprints and cigarette ash in the right place, they'll never know for certain," said Millard.

"And the imaginary man *knew* they'd never know for certain!" cried Hardelow. "That's what he was building on: Doubt! And they'll have to give him the benefit of the doubt which he created himself."

"He isn't an imaginary man," snapped Crendon. "He's one of us."

"You know what I mean," grumbled Hardelow. "He worked it out that we couldn't all be charged together, himself included, owing to Stranack's presence — oh! —"

Hardelow broke off in pink confusion. Crendon laughed.

"You've just remembered that I brought Stranack to this party — if he'll ever forgive me!"

"I say, Crendon! Look here!" floundered Hardelow. "You don't for one moment think that I think —"

"Of course I don't. And you don't think I think et cetera — when I point out that this murder could not have occurred, in the manner in which it did occur, if you had not run the boat into the mud."

"Take it easy!" shouted Stranack.

Instead of resenting the peremptory order, all four took it in meek silence. In their eyes the American had become a superior being — in the sense that he stood outside their peril.

Stranack, who had no such view of himself, apologized to his host.

"Sorry, Broughby — but it did strike me that in a minute we should all be accusing each other."

"I quite agree," returned Broughby.

Silence was restored. While they waited for Inspector Kyle, the thoughts of the four innocent men hovered about Mabel Rouse until their hatred of the unknown fifth was fanned to murderous proportions.

In this tidiest of murder hunts, the desk work gave extraordinarily little trouble to anybody. Within a couple of hours of leaving the *Astarte*, Kyle had before him all the real evidence he was likely to gather.

The first report covered the fingerprints. There were none on the handle of the knife, which had been wiped clean. On the door of the deceased's cabin there were only two distinct prints, one made by the deceased and the other by Broughby. Other prints were too blurred for identification. On the wedding ring there were blurred prints which could have been made by the deceased and could not have been made by any of the men.

While the detailed report of the microscopic examination of the tartan skirt was being typed, Kyle had received a short summary on the house telephone.

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"The outline was faint in parts and not continous. We are satisfied that it could have been made by Specimen Number Three — which is Crendon's shoe —"

"Good," said Kyle. "That fits in nicely."

"I said *could* have been made, Inspector. We cannot assert that it was made by that shoe and none other. It could also have been made by Specimen Number Two — Millard's shoe. Specimens One and Four are excluded by size."

"That's what I call a yes-and-no answer," grumbled Kyle, and added to himself, "unless we can get a dovetail on Crendon."

Sergeant Dobson came in with the inventory.

"Dobson, if one of those men on that boat killed that girl, he did it for one of two reasons — love or jealousy."

"What price blackmail?"

"Yes — or blackmail. He comes in with the knife in his hand to settle her threats once for all — and she throws away her wedding ring."

"What for, sir?"

"Exactly! Or a lover comes in to ask her to leave Broughby and come to him. She says okay, throws off Broughby's ring — and she *doesn't* bump her off. Or she tells him to go to hell — and she doesn't take off the wedding ring." As the other looked blank, Kyle added: "If it were jealousy, you get the same thing. There's no point at which she throws off the ring and then gets bumped off."

"I'm getting it, sir. She threw the ring at the killer?"

"Anyway, she threw it — and I'm trying to catch it," said Kyle, without conviction. "We won't need those shoes — send 'em back and say I'll be along soon. Now, let's have a look at that inventory. Did you find anything in the bed after they'd moved her?"

"Only the bedclothes. Do I go over with you, sir?"

"No. I'll send word if I want you. I'll take Carfax — his shorthand is the best."

It was nearly 9 when Kyle reached the pier. The loungers on the Embankment had thinned out and the pier was deserted except for the two plainclothesmen.

He was at his most urbane when he stepped aboard the *Astarte* and descended to the saloon — the typical family man late for a typical meeting of the typical parish council.

"I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, gentlemen. This is Constable Carfax, who will take notes for us, if you can fix him up somewhere."

Broughby fixed him up at the escritoire. Kyle seated himself in a wicker armchair under the high light and was provided with one of the small tables for his notebook and papers. Hardelow and Millard sat on a divan, diagonally facing Kyle. Stranack drew a chair to the side of the divan. Crendon and Broughby took the other divan. There was a short silence.

"I'm ready when you are, gentlemen."

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"We haven't appointed a spokesman," said Broughby. "Crendon, would you mind?"

"Certainly, if the Inspector agrees."

Kyle had foreseen this and decided that it would be better to consent.

"Before I attempt to marshal the facts," said Crendon, "I must make it clear that I am not representing this group in any professional sense. I am acting simply as a spokesman — and, of course, as a witness. I shall begin by asking Broughby to give his account of how we came to be together on this boat."

Broughby explained that it had been a birthday party for Mabel Rouse, detailed the invitations, then described the cruise to the point where the boat ran into the mud. Hardelow was asked to deal with the mishap, after which Crendon took over and brought the account up to the first incident over lunch. Soup was served, followed by cold chicken, when it was discovered that there was no carving knife on the table. "Carry on, please, Broughby?"

Crendon worked each witness into the narrative and then patted the evidence into place. He soon reached the point where the party was clearing away the lunch and Broughby was taking the crockery basket back to the galley.

"The knife, on top of the contents of the crockery basket, would have been visible to anyone passing down the corridor. Who in fact did pass down that corridor at the relevant times? The answer is that all of us in turn passed down that corridor — over a period of approximately half an hour. That fact, I imagine, is no more likely to help you to find the murderer than it has helped us."

No one interrupted him while he reported that the first man to go down the corridor was the American, who returned to the saloon about ten minutes later. The second was Hardelow who was absent for only a couple of minutes.

"I was the third to go aft," said Crendon. "Before returning to the saloon, I went up on deck and looked about. After a few minutes I rejoined the others. Any comments from those others?"

Broughby looked up.

"I didn't hear your footsteps on deck, Crendon," he said, "and I didn't hear you come down the companion from the deck."

"Didn't you? But I did go on deck. No doubt the Inspector will investigate the point later. You were the fourth man to leave the saloon, Broughby. Millard was the fifth and — we can say positively — the last. Millard was absent quite some time — I would say about ten minutes, if you all agree."

"I agree that it must have been at least ten minutes," said Millard. "But you know why!"

"Just a minute." Crendon turned to the others. "Has anybody anything to add before Millard takes the floor?"

"I have, though I don't suppose it's important," said Broughby. "When

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I had put the crockery basket back in the galley, I knocked on Mabel's door to ask if she wanted anything, which she didn't. She did not open the door, but I could tell she was not speaking from the bed."

"She must have opened that door a few seconds later," volunteered Stranack. "It was open when I went down the corridor, and she was lying on the bed. At her request, I shut it."

"It was shut when I passed by," said Hardelow.

Millard said the same.

"And it was shut when I passed it," contributed Crendon. "And now, Millard, will you take on from the moment when you left the saloon."

"On my way down the corridor I glanced into the galley. I had no conscious purpose and I saw nothing. But I felt uneasy without knowing why —"

"Pardon me, Millard, but wouldn't it be better to leave out what you felt and tell us what you did?"

"No! My feelings — and nothing else — have saved us from the macabre absurdity of taking poor Mabel to Southend regatta." He paused to pick up his thread. "With this feeling of unease I went along and had washed up. On the way back, the same unease made me stop short at the galley. The carving knife was no longer in the crockery basket — on top of the other things — where I had last seen it. That knife had been at the back of my consciousness ever since lunch."

"Why?" interrupted Crendon.

"Because I happened to be watching Mabel's face when Broughby brought it in. She looked frightened and she gave a sort of nod — *at the knife*. You all thought that Mabel was a bit tight. She wasn't! She had two gins before lunch and barely one glass of champagne at table — much less than half the amount she could carry quite comfortably. She was whipping herself up because she was frightfully upset about something — I don't know what it was. The whipping up didn't work; now and again she looked anxious for a half second or so, and towards the end she became rather noisy and silly."

Prelude to the wedding ring act. Kyle's spirits soared.

"I was as skeptical about my own feelings as any of you would have been," continued Millard. "I searched the galley for that knife. I'm not very good at that sort of thing and I made a lot of noise and even broke a plate or two. Broughby heard me and came along. He was not interested — left me in the galley. When I was certain the knife was not there, I made a scene about it in here. You all acted promptly, as if you shared my dread."

Crendon resumed his role of spokesman.

"We thumped at Mabel's door, then tried to open it. Millard, looking through the keyhole, saw only that it contained no key. I took the key from a guest cabin and with it unlocked the door. We saw — what you, Inspector, eventually saw. We did not enter the cabin. We called Broughby."

"Wasn't Mr. Broughby with you?"

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"He was not. He did not seem to be impressed by the disappearance of the carving knife." Crendon paused, but Broughby made no comment.

"Broughby shut the door, locked and sealed it with postage stamps. In this saloon we took common counsel, in which Stranack joined. I advised that we should not discuss the case. It was unanimously agreed to make straight for Scotland Yard."

Kyle was pleased. They had obligingly nailed themselves to their tale.

"Let's get this corridor business clear, first," he said. "Broughby spoke to her through a shut door. Within a minute or so of his going away, she opened the door. It was shut again a few minutes later, by Mr. Stranack, at her request. After that, each of you passed down the corridor and found the door shut?"

"That is the evidence of four innocent men," cut in Crendon. "Obviously, the guilty man opened the door, fulfilled his purpose, locked the door, and then probably threw the key overboard. Here is your problem, Inspector, in a nutshell. You may safely assume that we are all telling the truth, including the murderer. The murderer is telling lies only in respect to his actions between entering that corridor and emerging from it. I offer you the suggestion — with deference — that the murder was unpremeditated. One of us suddenly saw the tremendous opportunity created by Stranack's presence. One of us must be guilty, and the killer believed that the circumstances would make it impossible to prove which one."

Kyle perceived that Crendon was making the mistake, natural to a lawyer, of limiting himself to the facts "before the court." He had allowed no margin for discoveries made by the police but not yet revealed. That wedding ring, for instance — to say nothing of the footprint on the skirt.

The killer was making the same mistake. The crime was theoretically watertight — a neat little problem turning on the "insoluble riddle of the door," as the papers would be sure to call it.

"By your theory, Mr. Crendon, one of you is a maniac, always looking for a safe chance to kill? Or could there be some reasonable motive?"

"There's never a reasonable motive for murder," answered Crendon.

"Oh yes there is!" Hardelow had flared up. "That is, if you think you aren't going to be caught. We can't be cagey, now we're all in this hole. I'm going to blurt out everything about myself and trust to luck. She was going to stick me up to finance a play for her — it must be a darned rotten play or they wouldn't have let her hawk it around."

"And she threatened to make certain disclosures if you refused?" asked Kyle.

"Good lord no! She wouldn't do a dirty little crook's trick like that. She thought the play would be a howling success — she always thought everything was going to be splendid."

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"Then how was she sticking you up?"

"I dunno! I just felt that if I put up the money I'd be sort of robbing my wife. And if I didn't, I'd be a mean swine. She was that sort of woman. Why, when we hit that mudbank, it flashed into my mind that perhaps poor Mabel would be drowned, and that would be the end of a lot of misery for all of us — except Stranack, of course."

Kyle made a note that Hardelow admitted motive — then put a question mark beside it. It was too laboriously frank to be convincing. And how they kept harping on the innocence of Stranack!

"As Hardelow has started blurting, we must all follow suit or incur suspicion," said Crendon. "I myself have recently become engaged. I told my fiancée of my friendship with Mabel — and I had no fear whatever that Mabel would do anything unfriendly. But I frankly admit feeling some relief that I can never see her again."

Millard piped up next. "I was very fond of her, when I didn't want to be. I tried to forget her and was angry with myself when I couldn't. As she is dead, I am glad she was murdered. It would have been a horrible memory to live with if she had committed suicide — she was so fond of life."

That was a flourish, Kyle told himself. But he remembered that Hardelow, too, had talked mawkishly about the girl.

"I can't quite toe the confessional line," said Broughby. "This morning I was informed that I had been chosen as a Parliamentary candidate. I didn't have to tell Mabel that our ménage wouldn't fit in. She told me. In all friendliness and without a thought for herself — without a single stipulation or request — she said she would leave me tomorrow and she meant tomorrow. She was no danger to me. I know she would never have done anything that would injure me."

That would be a reason for taking off the wedding ring tomorrow — not today, in the middle of the party. It was certainly not a reason for flinging it across the cabin. And anyway, the one thing certain about the ring incident was that Broughby was not concerned in it. Looked at from another angle, Broughby's story had given the girl another build-up. Possibly this was a technique. The American might be useful here.

"She comes over to me as a very glamorous and fascinating woman," he said. "Mr. Stranack, from what you saw of her, do you agree with that?"

"I would say she was striking looking, not glamorous," answered Stranack, weighing his words. "As to fascination, she was not a clever, mysterious sort of woman. But she had the knack of making a man feel there was something fine in her nature which he alone had the power to bring out. To put it the other way round, she could draw the ordinary sort of man out of his ordinariness."

Kyle was impressed. He was bound to accept that she was not the ordi-

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nary high class joy-girl, but a woman of personality who could produce unexpected reactions. Excluding Stranack, they all seemed to have been fond of her and to have admired her character, but nevertheless wished her dead. You certainly couldn't call that ordinary! Broughby even praised her for consenting to leave him.

"The essential stretch of time," Crendon was saying, "is something less than forty minutes. It begins when Stranack at Mabel's request shut her door. The fact that she was then alive renders Broughby's previous movements unimportant. Thereafter, Hardelow was absent from the saloon for such a short time that I think Broughby will agree with Millard and with me that he can be eliminated. That leaves Broughby, Millard, and myself as the only legitimate suspects."

Kyle had already eliminated Broughby on the ground that he could not conceivably have taken part in the wedding ring act. He now eliminated Millard. From the murderer's point of view, the wedding ring act, involving conversation, would have taken a dangerous amount of time. The murderer would not have wasted more time pretending to look for the knife in the galley — there would have been no sense in it, since it could not create an alibi.

That left Crendon.

"I'll accept your theory, Mr. Crendon. You offer me three suspects, including yourself. Obviously you eliminate yourself?"

"I do. But that does not mean that I can reasonably suspect an individual — until there is evidence of guilt."

The last words sounded very like a challenge. Kyle circled.

"How do you know someone didn't board the boat without any of you hearing him?"

"We must not exclude that possibility," said Crendon with an air of resolute broadmindedness. "On the land side no one could have approached. On the river side, a skilled waterman, approaching in a small boat, might have succeeded in coming aboard. But with what purpose? Robbery? Mabel had with her in that cabin an emerald brooch and a diamond bracelet — possibly other valuables. Your papers will no doubt corroborate my statement."

Kyle obediently studied the inventory — a painstaking and reliable document, listing every item found in Mabel's cabin. He studied it at some length and then looked up without comment.

Crendon continued: "If we conclude that this hypothetical intruder was not a thief, we have to postulate a maniac, or a disappointed lover. Neither maniac nor lover could have known beforehand that we would run aground there and that these conditions would prevail."

So Crendon was standing pat. No red herrings, even if the police offered them. No conspiracy. No means of proving anything against any individual man. Per-*haps!* Kyle got up.

"Excuse me a minute."

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He left the saloon, spoke to his man on guard by the wheelhouse, then came back, sat down, and pretended to pore over his notes. In the silence everyone in the saloon heard footsteps on deck — footsteps of one who walks slowly and self-consciously, as if under instructions from his inspector.

"When Mr. Crendon strolled, as he informed us, on deck, Mr. Broughby did not hear him. Did anyone else hear Crendon's footsteps?"

There was no answer. Crendon smiled tolerantly.

"Do you know, Inspector, I saw Broughby look at his watch just now? Yet, every fifteen minutes, Big Ben fills this saloon with its din. Broughby heard Big Ben, but he did not notice Big Ben. I repeat, Inspector, that I walked on deck."

"It's only a check-up, Mr. Crendon," said Kyle indifferently, while his thoughts harked back to the wedding ring. Hardelow and Broughby were out of it. He felt compelled now to exclude Crendon also: if Crendon had taken part in the wedding ring act and knew that it would be found on the floor, he would have worked it into the narrative, with an answer as glib as the stuff about Big Ben.

That left only Millard. But Millard had wasted time in the galley. Considered as the murderer, he would not have had time for the wedding ring act as well.

There then flashed into Kyle's mind a suggestion so dangerous to his own position that he felt he must take another look before he leaped. He did a little more stage business with his notebook.

"Are you all agreed —" He began slowly, hesitated, then went on, "Are you all agreed that the murder must have been committed before Broughby and Millard met in the galley?"

There were murmurs of assent, which Crendon gathered up.

"After the galley incident, no one entered the corridor until the three of us went to call Mabel."

Kyle nodded. The check-up confirmed his own knowledge of what they had said.

"Can any of you give me a leg-up over this?" He looked from one to another. "We have evidence that the deceased talked for several minutes with someone *after* Mr. Broughby had spoken to her through the closed door."

"You have not forgotten, Inspector," put in Crendon, "that a minute or so later the door was open when Mr. Stranack passed, and that he shut it?"

"I was about to say that I had a chat with her, lasting a few minutes." The American, who had been thrust into the role of spectator, roused himself and sat upright in the wicker armchair.

"A few minutes?" echoed Kyle. "How was the deceased dressed while you were talking to her, Mr. Stranack?"

"As she was when she was murdered — in her slip."

Kyle concealed his elation by contriving to look shocked.

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"I must say, I understood, from the way you gave me the information, that you shut the door in passing?"

"Sorry, Inspector, it didn't occur to me that I might be misleading you."

"A few minutes!" Kyle mouthed the words. "You meet her today for the first time. You, as well as the others, give her a good character in spite of her — well — broadmindedness. And there she is holding a conversation with a comparative stranger, with the door closed and she dressed only in a slip!"

Broughby tried to put his oar in. "Lots of respectable girls, nowadays —"

"We're talking about a particular girl," interrupted Kyle. "Mr. Stranack, did the deceased, in your presence, take off her wedding ring and fling it across the room?"

"She did."

That was enough for Kyle. There was just one thing that could now make sense of the wedding ring act.

"Was the deceased your wife, Mr. Stranack?"

"*Damnation!*" bellowed Stranack. "Yes, she was! But as it has nothing whatever to do with your investigation, I hoped to keep it off the record."

"Good God, Stranack!" exploded Crendon. "You pulled my leg about her and you treated her here as if you'd never met her before."

"I hope you will accept my apology, Crendon, and see it as an innocent deception which could hurt nobody. That still holds good. I apologize to you, too, Broughby. My one purpose was to have a word with her in private, to ask her if she wished to come back to me. I had that word before lunch — and she said she did not want to. So I went on treating her as a stranger.

"When I saw her in the cabin, she told me she had changed her mind, that she was tired of the life she was living and wished to come back to me.

"It was a condition of my offer that she should let me pay back any money she had received from her friends, and that she should return any valuable presents. She referred to this in the cabin. I should explain that she was dramatizing herself a little, though she meant what she said. Right there and then she removed the jewelry she was wearing and put it under the pillow, assuring me that she intended to return all presents she had received from her lovers at the first opportunity. She took off the wedding ring, which Broughby had given her, and flung it from her with an elaborate gesture and high-falutin' words to the effect that it meant nothing to her. That is all. It was then that I shut the door."

Another one of the frank, manly confessions that stopped too soon, thought Kyle.

"I take it, Mr. Stranack, that you entered her cabin — for the purpose of this conversation?"

"No. I remained in the corridor. I had one hand on the door, I think. Probably you've found my prints."

An errant wife accepts an ever-loving husband's offer to take her

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back, mused Kyle; no kiss — just a palaver, with him standing in the doorway all the time.

Crendon was looking as if the whole thing were a personal insult. Kyle saw a chance to get a bit of his own back.

"Mr. Crendon, I will not report you to your Benchers if you will give me a bit of free legal advice. After what Mr. Stranack has told us, is he still so obviously a disinterested person that I can't run you all in for conspiracy?"

Somewhat to Kyle's dismay, Crendon took it as a genuine consultation.

"His membership of the Embassy is now irrelevant to you as a criminal investigator, since there might be a *prima facie* case against him for felony, namely the murder of his wife — alternatively for shielding the murderer of a hypothetically unwanted wife. It is therefore my opinion that, if you were to arrest us all, no action would lie for wrongful arrest."

Kyle felt as if he had fallen over his own feet.

Crendon went on: "But before you proceed to arrest us — if that be your intention — I ask you to allow me to make an attempt to clear the matter up. I would add that I am sure my attempt will be successful."

Taking consent for granted, he went behind Kyle's chair, so that he faced everyone in the saloon except Kyle and the shorthand writer.

"I shall not look at any of you, but I want you all to look at me." He fixed his gaze on the copper bowl of flowers on a bracket above Millard's head. "I assert, without proof, that I did not commit this murder. I assert that one of you did. To him I am now speaking."

His tone was even and matter-of-fact. For the first time, Kyle perceived that the man had dignity behind his bumptiousness.

"On impulse, you — the murderer — killed that dear, delightful, dreadful woman. Why? Because you feared your imagination and your will would never be your own while she was alive. I stand very close to you. When she was mocking my feeling for her by her stupid vulgarity over lunch, I too wanted to kill her. You had the courage of your impulse, which I lacked. You relied for your safety — and equally for that of all of us, your friends — on a legal dilemma; but that legal dilemma no longer exists. You cannot now wish to ruin us socially and professionally by forcing us to stand with you in the dock — if only for a short time in the lower court. You staked, and you have lost. As your friend I remind you that this is the moment to pay up."

Kyle was almost ready to believe that someone would confess. He glanced at the plaster on Millard's hand. Hardelow sneezed. Then the moment passed.

"Thank you, Inspector." Crendon dropped wearily into the nearest chair. In the silence that followed his appeal, the lines deepened round his mouth so that he looked like an elderly judge in mufti.

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Millard leaned forward on the divan.

"Mabel's legacy!" he cried wildly. "We shall never again trust men of our own kind — nor ourselves. The police will now treat us as the bunch of crooks we have become."

"Well, I must say I'm disappointed," said Kyle. "It couldn't have been put better than Mr. Crendon put it." It occurred to him that the appeal might yet succeed if it were reinforced with a fact or two.

"Before we send for the handcuffs," he grinned, in Millard's direction, "we'll have one more try to get off the ground."

They were mystified when he stood up, after taking from his bag a ruler and a large safety pin.

"Gentlemen, will you all please come with me to the cabin. Mr. Broughby, may I have two cleaning cloths or two pieces of any soft material?"

In order to produce the cleaning cloths, Broughby headed the procession down the passage.

Kyle broke the police seals on the door. The cabin looked much the same. But the bedding had been removed, revealing a spring mattress.

"This plain cloth in my right hand represents the deceased's skirt."

He placed it on the floor, by the bed, so that it touched the chalk marking at as many points as possible. "This other cloth, let's say, is her jumper — this safety pin stands for the emerald brooch. The position of the jumper is only approximate."

"About 10 per cent of it was flopping across the skirt," said Stranack.

"Thank you." Kyle made the adjustment. "I will now show you all the essential movements of the killer — the movements which we *know* he made."

He came out of the cabin, took a few steps in the direction of the kitchen.

"This ruler represents the knife, which the murderer has just taken from the kitchen. I don't know whether the door of the cabin is open — if it is shut, he opens it. But I do know that the deceased is not asleep. The killer keeps the knife out of her line of vision — like this, perhaps — because if she were to see it she might scream. She does not see it. She receives him in a friendly manner. He comes in. Sooner or later, he sits on the side of the bed, almost exactly where I am sitting now, his foot on her skirt — like this.

"She puts her right arm round him — whether they actually kiss I don't know. At any rate, he lowers his body in her direction until his left hand can reach her jumper on the floor — like this — without his getting off the bed. He swings the jumper over her head and throat — like this — to protect himself from bloodstains — before he stabs. Whether he was aware of the brooch, again I don't know — he might have caught his hand in the pin — we don't know, yet.

"Then he leaves the cabin, shutting and locking the door. We assume, with Mr. Crendon, that he probably

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threw the key into the river. Then he returned to the saloon. That's all for now. Thank you, gentlemen."

There was a slow procession back to the saloon, Kyle in the rear. He had shot his bolt, and in the next few minutes he would know whether he had hit anything.

"The one among you who is the killer," he said when they were all sitting down, "now knows how much we know."

There should be some sign somewhere, he thought. He glanced at the American who had so readily waived his right to refuse interrogation but was now wearing the traditional poker face.

"Mr. Crendon's very pointed appeal fell flat because the killer still hoped I was bluffing — that I didn't want complications with the Embassy. The Embassy is not my pigeon. I plow on until the higher authorities call me off."

Still the poker face. Come to that, they all had poker faces. His shot seemed to have missed. He himself no longer believed there was a conspiracy. He accepted Crendon's view that it was a one-man job, with no sympathizers.

He would dodge making a conspiracy charge if he could.

"Mr. Millard, the stain on your trousers is of the same blood group as that of deceased."

"Then so is my own blood. It came from the cut on my hand." He added: "As I told you, it was grazed by the diamonds in Mabel's bracelet."

"How soon after you received the cut did the deceased leave the saloon?"

"Broughby brought the plaster. As soon as she had applied it, he grabbed her and took her off. Say a couple of minutes, at the most."

"Still wearing the bracelet?"

"Yes, it hadn't been damaged."

"Then microscopic examination of the bracelet should reveal minute pieces of your skin?"

"I suppose so. Hasn't it?"

"We don't know, yet," answered Kyle. Again he turned to the inventory and studied it. Then he decided to take the risk of inventing a spot of science. "In those tests," he asserted, "a lot depends on the nature of the diamonds. What sort of diamonds were they? Where was the bracelet bought, Mr. Broughby?"

Broughby turned to Crendon, who answered: "I bought it. At Wrenson's. I can assure you they are real diamonds. I gave it to her as a birthday present — with Broughby's consent, of course."

"That being the case, gentlemen," said Kyle, beaming, "a charge of conspiracy will not be brought. Mr. Crendon, you are under arrest and will be charged with the murder. I assume that the customary caution is unnecessary."

Crendon employed his forensic gesture of non-understanding.

"I am a little dazed, Inspector. You propose to charge *me* with the murder — because I bought the bracelet at Wrenson's?"

"Because the bracelet was on her

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wrist when she left this saloon for the cabin, because it was seen in the cabin by Mr. Stranack, and because it was *not* found in the cabin when we took over. We've never seen that bracelet."

"Therefore the bracelet was taken by the murderer!" said Crendon. "As murderer, I pointlessly took the bracelet and threw it into the river with the key? Or did I keep it? Really, Inspector!"

"The girl told Mr. Stranack that she intended to give back all the presents she had received from men — *at the first opportunity!* She took off what she was wearing at the time and put it under her pillow."

"Oh, I see!" Crendon's eyes were bright with triumph. "Then, my dear fellow, why on earth didn't you search me before reciting that preposterous formula about charging me with murder?" He stretched out his arms. "Search me now, for heaven's sake! Search me — and recover your own sanity!"

"I'd rather you searched yourself, Mr. Crendon."

Crendon's smile vanished. He had been utterly certain the Inspector would search him — equally certain that the Inspector would find nothing. He was still certain that nothing would be found — but his cocksureness had been wiped out by the form in which Kyle had put his words.

"That's a damn funny thing for you to say," Crendon muttered. For a moment paralyzing doubt held him, while he groped in memory. Then, with a quick, nervous movement, he thrust his hand into his breast pocket.

"Nothing there!" he cried.

"She couldn't reach that pocket. She had her right arm around you while you were sitting on the bed. Try your right-hand side pocket."

With the same quick, nervous movement, Crendon thrust his hand into his right side-pocket — and pulled out the diamond bracelet.

He stared at it for several seconds, then laid it on Kyle's table.

"I'm not the only man in this room who was fool enough to think he couldn't live without her. At lunch today she showed me that I couldn't live *with* her — after I had promised to do so." He turned to Stranack, bestowing an elaborate glance of compassion. "It's a pity you didn't let me into the secret, old man." Then he turned to Kyle, dramatizing himself as deliberately as had Mabel. "Congratulations on your brilliant sequence built on that wedding ring. If I had only known!"

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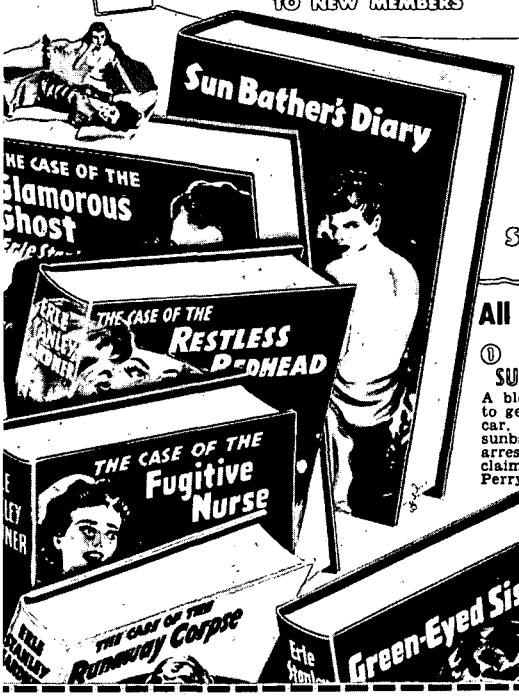

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① THE CASE OF THE **SUNBATHER'S DIARY**

A blonde offers Perry $1500 to get back her clothes and car, stolen while she was sunbathing. Then the police arrest her for murder. They claim the killer is either Perry's client—or *Perry!*

② THE CASE OF THE **GLAMOROUS GHOST**

Perry's client doesn't remember what happened the night her husband was murdered. She can't recognize her own .38 — the murder weapon. Only two people can clear her. One is missing — the other is *dead!*

③ THE CASE OF THE **RESTLESS REDHEAD**

Mason's client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her—though he suspects she may be *guilty!*

④ THE CASE OF THE **FUGITIVE NURSE**

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

⑤ THE CASE OF THE **RUNAWAY CORPSE**

A client hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband. Perry finds *blank* paper! Police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

⑥ THE CASE OF THE **GREEN-EYED SISTER**

Grogan, a blackmailer, wants $20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found DEAD! Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

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